The (Re)production of Nature on Natural Resource Based Reality Television

By

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ABSTRACT

THE (RE)PRODUCTION OF NATURE ON NATURAL RESOURCE BASED REALITY TELEVISION

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In the last ten years, reality television series focused on primary sector activities such as fishing (e.g., Deadliest Catch), mining (e.g., Yukon Gold), and forestry (e.g., American Loggers) have been ratings hits for major television networks. These series are a new iteration in the way that nature is (re)produced on television that have the potential to influence imaginaries about human-environment relations in these rural regions. This thesis empirically examines 100 episodes across 15 different series and critically analyzes how this genre mediates human-environment relations. The thesis argues that the documentation of resource based reality series and their depictions of a particular masculine nationalism works to save a virtual image of the imaginary frontier. In doing so, this research highlights the need for more critical analysis of the proliferation of natural resource based reality television on major television networks and greater consideration of the implications for public narratives surrounding human-environment relations.

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Chapter 1. Introduction and Literature Review

1.1. Overview

Reality television series have proliferated on cable television over the last two to three decades. In the last ten years, the number of reality television series focused specifically on nature, natural resources, and workers in the primary sector of the economy has exploded in North America (Cox, 2014). Television shows focused on primary sector activities such as fishing (e.g., *Deadliest Catch*), mining (e.g., *Yukon Gold)*, and forestry (e.g., *American Loggers*) have been ratings hits for the television networks Discovery Communications (Discovery) and The National Geographic Channel (National Geographic) (Kissell, 2015; Strauss, 2008). Between Discovery and National Geographic alone, more than twenty of these resource/nature based reality television series, many spanning multiple seasons, have aired in the last ten years (Discovery, 2016; National Geographic, 2016). Perhaps the most prominent of these series is *Deadliest Catch* on Discovery, which premiered in 2005. For over a decade, *Deadliest Catch* has been a staple in Discovery's television line up, garnering 16 Emmy wins and 42 nominations, while its twelfth season continued to draw in around two and a half million viewers per episode (Emmys, 2017; Welch, 2016). The proliferation of these series calls for attention from human geographers, especially as increasing urbanization creates a separation between many viewers and these different primary sector activities. This furthers the potential these series have to influence imaginaries about human-environment relations in these rural regions.

Many geographers have considered the ways in which nature is both socially constructed and materially produced (e.g., Nightingale, 2006; Prudham, 2009). Long-established understandings of wilderness have produced a dualism reinforcing separation between humans and nature (Cronon, 1996). Using terms such as (re)production acknowledges the intersection of

the discourse and the materiality that shape representations and imaginaries of nature. For years the television has been a powerful medium through which messages focused on nature have been produced and consumed. Nature based reality television series represent a new iteration in the way nature is reproduced by blending together two prominent television genres: wildlife films, and reality television. Research into the history of wildlife films has considered the way they further the perceived separation between human and nature (e.g., Horak, 2006; Chris, 2006; Brockington, 2009; Huggan, 2013). Where as research focused on longstanding reality television series like *Big Brother* and *Survivor,* has shown that reality television is a dynamic site in which gender, and class identities, among others are (re)negotiated (e.g., Negra et al., 2013; Cooke-Jackson and Hansen, 2008; Bell-Jordan, 2008; Little and Panelli, 2007). When it comes to natural resource based reality television as a whole genre, the cross-section between nature and identity remains understudied. Understanding *what* images and messages about nature and primary sector identities these series convey, and *how* and *why* they do so is pressing. So too is building an appreciation for *what effects* the (re)production of nature through reality television may have over time (Kjus, 2009). The remainder of this chapter will first outline the aims and objectives of the thesis before reviewing the relevant literature in order to examine the existing academic basis and provide context to the study of nature on reality television, before describing the structure of the thesis.

1.2. Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research is to examine natural resource based reality television series as a new iteration in the (re)production of nature on television, and to critically analyze how this genre mediates human-environment relations. This aim was accomplished through the following objectives:

Objective 1: Build a database of resource extraction based reality television series on Discovery Channel and National Geographic between 2005 - April 2016

Objective 2: Use discourse analysis to categorize and group emergent messages about nature that arise from a sample of episodes from different television series

Objective 3: Critically analyze how human-environment relations are mediated, and with what effect.

Overall, the thesis contributes to media geography scholarship focused on how television media informs human-environment relationships. Utilizing a sample of 100 different episodes across 15 series, this research analyzes the cross-section between nature and the identities of people working in the primary sector on these series. Through a systematic review of the genre, this research has identified three prominent themes that intersect in unique ways to influence human-environment relations: (1) masculinity; (2) nationalism; and (3) the frontier.

1.3. Literature Review

The following literature review will be divided into three sections. The first section will examine the wildlife film genre, including its rise, structure, and implications for human-environment relations off-screen. The second section will explore the reality television genre, including the limited literature focused specifically on natural resource based reality television where themes of masculinity, nationalism, and the frontier have begun to emerge. Given the lack of literature on the cross-section of resource based reality television, the third section of this review considers how these themes appear in other bodies of literature. This section focuses primarily on the prominence of these themes in American Westerns in order to more fully understand the way they are utilized to construct a narrative in film and television.

1.3.1. Wildlife films

Television programming with a focus on wildlife and exploration became increasingly popular following the Second World War (Chris, 2006). These programs were seen as a way to bring animals and their natural habitats closer to humans, while also blurring the lines between fact and fiction to increase the audience's excitement (Horak, 2006). Near the turn of the century two prominent styles began to emerge representing different ends of a tension between the entertainment and educational aspects of wildlife films (Brockington, 2009). The first style, known as 'Blue Chip'[1] Nature Documentaries, has incredibly high production values and huge budgets (Huggan, 2013). Prominent examples of this style include the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) *Planet Earth,* and *The Blue Planet* (Brockington, 2009). The second, less expensive style, feature a host that takes the audience on an adventure to learn about wildlife, such as Steve Irwin's *Crocodile Hunter,* and *The Jeff Corwin Experience* (Chris, 2006; Cottle, 2004). These two styles utilize different documentary style techniques to form connections between the audience and the wildlife featured on the screen.

'Blue Chip' nature documentaries, such as *Planet Earth,* are meant to be visually beautiful and have a very formal aesthetic featuring long takes, choreographed sequences, zoom photography, and emotionally manipulative musical scores (Brockington, 2009; Huggan, 2013). These documentaries are filmed over years, in a variety of locations, however by compressing this footage into short episodes, it seems as if the rare events that are featured are actually part of everyday life (Brockington, 2009). Despite the careful editing 'Blue Chip' nature documentaries are seen as apolitical as they are driven by an appeal to authenticity (Brockington, 2009; Huggan, 2013). It seems to the audience that nature does not have the ability to act, and therefore the

[1] It is likely that as with blue chip businesses or stocks, the name 'blue chip' documentaries is referring to the simplest set of poker chips in which blue chips hold the greatest value. This

filmmakers are simply revealing the truth of what has occurred (Brockington, 2009). These nature documentaries are seen as a way to extend the human vision, to allow them to be privy to the private lives of animals that people are unable to experience (Horak, 2006).

'Blue Chip' documentaries rarely feature information on the historical, social, or political context of the region they are focusing on (Brockington, 2009). Rather, they feature images of a 'primeval wilderness' devoid of human life, focusing on a specific charismatic animal or group of animals (Brockington, 2009). These documentaries rely on a (typically male) narrator to construct meaning from disparate shots of nature (Horak, 2006). Specifically, due to his popularity, the narration style of David Attenborough has become synonymous with the 'Blue Chip' style (Huggan, 2013). Through this narration the wildlife is anthropomorphized and their behavior is often conveyed in terms of a Western nuclear family structure, wherein fathers, mothers and children carry out expected roles (Brockington, 2009). Without this narration it would be difficult for the viewer to form a relationship with the wildlife on their screens (Brockington, 2009).

In contrast to 'Blue Chip' documentaries, the second prominent style of wildlife film, host-led television series, are characterized by their low production costs (Chris, 2006). These series tend to utilize pools of footage from other sources, and staged reaction shots in order to increase the perceived risk that the host is facing (Chris, 2006). For example, Steve Irwin may reach his hand into an open burrow only to have him withdraw it quickly in shock while the screen cuts to a shot of a dangerous animal in a different burrow, this gives the illusion that he could have been injured (Chris, 2006). In addition to the both staged and real danger, these series utilize a brasher comedy and in the case of Steve Irwin's *Crocodile Hunter* a "stereotypical

rough and tumble Australian masculinity" to increase their entertainment value (Chris, 2006, p. 94).

This format of nature on television does not maintain the separation and observer quality emphasized in "Blue Chip' nature documentaries (Horak, 2006). Rather the (often male) hosts interact directly with the animals creating a personal relationship with them that they then invite the audience to be a part of (Brown, 2010). These personalities often encouraged environmental conservation through the personal relationship they formed between the wildlife and the audience, though little focus was devoted to the social implications of conservation efforts (Horak, 2006). Particularly with Steve Irwin, his "in-your-face approach to wildlife demanded they accommodate his presence in their world" (Brockington, 2009, p. 48).

Though structurally 'Blue Chip' nature documentaries and host-led television series may appear very different, they share many similar implications for human-environment relations off-screen. Even with tensions between entertainment and education there is a demand from the audience that these wildlife films be authentic, and true to nature (Brockington, 2009). Understanding these series as truth could be very problematic as "wildlife film by its very nature, and throughout its history, has always involved careful constructions that interpret nature, rather than reveal it" (Brockington, 2009, p. 44). In each style the presenter or presentation ascribes attributes to nature, giving it particular qualities (Brockington, 2009). There is a constant repetition of images of what nature should look like, often without any regard to other social, or political issues in the 'wild places' that are presented (Brockington, 2009). As the presenter anthropomorphizes animals to create a 'false intimacy' with the wildlife on screen, it reinforces that wildlife behaviors similarly to humans, and those less charismatic animals that are not as

easily anthropomorphized may be excluded from these images of what nature should look like (Brockington, 2009).

Both 'Blue Chip' documentaries and host-led television series do little to acknowledge the role of humans in their depictions of nature (Huggan, 2013). While humans are missing altogether from 'Blue Chip' documentaries (excluding the narrator), there is very little effort put into host-led conservation shows to address the social implications of conservation efforts (Huggan, 2013). While the hosts interact directly with the wildlife, these series still maintain a separation from humans and nature, to which the host is an exception (Huggan, 2013). Additionally, the host's close connection with wildlife is demonstrated by their control and 'mastery' over it (Brockington, 2009, p. 48). Furthermore, it is important to note that narrators and hosts in both styles embody the role of the expert, who is integral to the audience's comprehensive of the images of nature appearing on the screen. These experts are almost always male, highlighting a gendered aspect to the control and 'mastery' over nature that is presented which needs to be further explored.

Additionally, few members of the audience of nature documentaries are familiar with the wildlife in faraway places. As previously stated, the presentation of nature on television is a way to expand the human vision of the world (Horak, 2006). Nature documentaries and wildlife films take the viewer to "weird and wonderful countries, places that you would only dream about, you've never seen and you are not likely to anyway" (Brockington, 2009, p. 49). By preserving these images of a world that is far removed from the everyday lives of the audience, Huggan (2013) argues that these documentaries attempt to restore the "ancient bond between humanity and nature that has long since been broken by modern life" (p. 32). However, it is likely that they

do just the opposite. These films turn nature into a spectacle, and reinforce the distance and separation of humans from nature and wildlife (Huggan, 2013).

These films become a way for people to 'experience' nature, which could have consequences for the way people understand and enjoy nature beyond their television screens. Brockington (2009) argues that the "demand for wildlife film is both a product of our alienation from nature, and one of the forces that produces and enhances that alienation" (p. 57). Horak (2006) considers that while the popularity of wildlife films has increased, it seems to be in an inverse proportion to the actual number of animals and untouched habitats surviving in the regions they feature. Horak (2006) asks the question of wildlife documentaries, "Is the growing obsession to document visually the animal world at least partially a desperate act 'to save' wildlife for a virtual world?" (p. 460). It has been suggested that the goal of these filmmakers is to capture images of animals to provide society a record of what was lost (Horak, 2006).

In summary, images of nature and wildlife have been a staple on television for decades. While different styles of filmmaking such as 'Blue Chip' nature documentaries, and host-led television series utilize different film formatting, structures, and techniques they have similar implications for human-environment relations off-screen. While these series may attempt to inform the audience about environmental matters, by turning nature into a spectacle they often further the separation between humans and nature. Furthermore, it is predominantly males who are privileged enough to enter and subsequently demonstrate their 'mastery' over wildlife in these wild places, though there is limited research on the role of masculinity in these series (Chris, 2006; Brockington, 2009).

1.3.2. Reality Television

Reality television has been around since 1973's *An American Family,* but it was the premiere of series like *Survivor* in 2000 that cemented their ubiquity in mainstream television (Deery, 2004; Grazian, 2010). Though some may recognize reality television when they see it, there is no industry standard or definition that exists for the genre (Nabi et al., 2003). This research will follow the definition set forth by Nabi et al. (2003) in which reality television is comprised of:

> "programs that film real people as they live out events (contrived or otherwise) in their lives, as these events occur. Such programming is characterized by several elements: (a) people portraying themselves (i.e., not actors or public figures performing roles), (b) filmed at least in part in their living or working environment rather than on a set, (c) without a script, (d) with events placed in a narrative context, (e) for the primary purpose of viewer entertainment" (Nabi et al., 2003, p. 304).

This definition includes series such as *Survivor, The Amazing Race,* and *Cops* in addition to series that comprise the focus of this thesis such as *Deadliest Catch,* and *Gold Rush.*

Similar to wildlife films, there has been an ongoing commentary regarding how reality television blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction (Grazian, 2010). Reality television is often viewed as a highly contrived and staged version of reality, and is criticized for its inauthenticity (Grazian, 2010; Negra et al., 2013). The rise in the number and variety of reality television series has been attributed to several production factors such as new technologies, light weight cameras, the proliferation of cable channels, and the low cost, and low risk involved in their creation (Wells, 2015). Some researchers have also attributed the rise in reality television to a broader discourse of neoliberal self-governance, as the series encourage competition, individualism and for the 'real people' featured to take responsibility for their own troubles (Wells, 2015; Grazian, 2010). Grazian (2010) argues that these individualistic themes are a

product of neoliberal discourses, but by repeating these messages they also contribute to and reinforce those discourses.

While there are a wide variety of styles and genres within reality television, from series focusing on makeovers to crime to survival, they do tend to utilize a similar structure and filming format. Structurally, reality television series utilize many film making techniques from classic documentaries such as the fly-on-the-wall gaze (Moorti and Ross, 2004). This technique refers the minimal interference of the camera crew as the subject is seen candidly as a fly may see them (Moorti and Ross, 2004). It is common to use this technique cut in with shots of a talking head, which focuses on the head and shoulders of a person as they address the camera specifically. There is little to no action during a talking head and characters are likely prompted by questions from producers. Jump cuts, abrupt transitions between scenes that make it seem that the subject is jumping from one spot to the next, are often utilized to fracture space or create a sense of urgency (Aitken and Lukinbeal, 1997). The use of frankenbiting is also very common, and controversial, on reality television, where out of context clips and audio are edited together often to convey a sense of drama (Arnovitz, 2004).

In addition to using some of same filming techniques as wildlife films some reality television produces similar images of a nature that is untouched by man. This is particularly true for the series *Survivor,* which features a group of castaways isolated in a remote location where they must compete in order to avoid elimination and for a chance at a final cash grand prize. *Survivor* and other similar reality series feature a primordial untouched nature far from civilization (Waggoner, 2004). The series is rife with shots of panoramic vistas of "unspoiled nature, rhythmic sounds of tribal drumbeats, and clips of indigenous animals", the repetition of

these images and messages reinforces the imaginary that these distant, exotic places exist outside of and untouched by modern civilization (Waggoner, 2004, p. 218).

Most analyses of reality television have paid greater attention to the identities of the people they feature, with a particular focus on how they utilize stereotypes, and how they form relationships with each other and the places they inhabit than clear connections with nature (e.g., Pottie-Sherman and Wilkes, 2015; Cavender et al., 1999). Reality television tends to depict men and women in established and accepted ways. This is because drawing on a recognizable stereotype reiterates and reaffirms its representation for the viewer as a form of reality (Pottie-Sherman and Wilkes, 2015). Many stereotypes regarding gender, class, and work gain legitimacy through their prevalence on reality television. These depictions of gender tend to involve unreachable models, in which the ideal male and ideal female are often defined in relation to one another. In their analysis of reality television Cavender et al. (1999) states, "hegemonic masculinity today is a matter of the subordination of women, authority, aggression, and technical competence. Emphasized femininity is subordinate to and defined by hegemonic masculinity" (p. 644). Buchanan (2014) outlines five primary features of hegemonic masculinity in American culture: (1) Physical force and control, (2) occupational achievement, (3) familial patriarchy (4) frontiersmanship and (5) heterosexuality.

The competition-based reality television genre includes series such as *Survivor* and *The Amazing Race* (Waggoner, 2004; Bell-Jordan, 2008). As is the case with *Survivor* these shows are often set in more rural locations, and feature individual contestants who compete in teams for a final prize. These rural locations are often associated with hyper-masculine men and their control over nature (Little and Panelli, 2007). Within the setting of a harsh and unforgiving nature men are perceived as fit, strong and capable (Little and Panelli, 2007). In contrast to this

women are seen as weak, and unsuitable for the harsh nature that men can conquer (Little and Panelli, 2007). While these series often show 'characters' crossing the barriers of culturally constructed gender roles, they are emphasized as an exception, which further reinforces the normalcy of those gender roles (Edwards, 2004).

The few studies on resource based reality series that do exist have explored masculinity, but they have done so without explicit attention to the relationship between masculinity and nature. Moreover, these studies singled-out *Deadliest Catch* (e.g., Kirby, 2013; Buchanan, 2014; Wells, 2015) and *Gold Rush* (e.g., Trapani and Winn, 2014) specifically, rather than attending to the genre as a whole. These studies consider the way these television series depict men and women in established and accepted ways wherein the concept of 'male supremacy' is assumed (Buchanan, 2014). This form of white hegemonic masculinity assumes inherent differences between men and women, and that heterosexuality is normal (Buchanan, 2014). Buchanan (2014) attributes the success of *Deadliest Catch* to a crisis in masculinity, in which new images of different masculinities present an attack on the traditional white, male hegemony. Similarly, Trapani and Winn (2014) have attributed the popularity of Discovery's *Gold Rush* to a 'masculinity crisis' and 'male hysteria' brought on by the systemic efforts to promote feminism, political correctness or multiculturalism (Trapani and Winn, 2014). This has led to a perceived issue of masculinity losing control (of authority, of oneself, etc.) (Trapani and Winn, 2014).

These articles analyze the role of masculinity and work in a world where "white male power has endured encroachment as women, gays and minorities have gained social power in recent decades" (Buchanan, 2014, p. 2). These studies briefly consider the environments that these jobs take place, but the importance of this connection needs to be further examined. Buchanan (2014) examines how *Deadliest Catch* "demonstrates an environment where

traditional masculinity is exercised, a place where white males can perform masculine rituals, compete with one another in an adverse environment and reassert their position in the social and cultural hierarchies" (p. 2). There remains a gap in the understanding of how masculinity is produced in relation to these environments rather than the role they play as a backdrop to the stories of the men working in them.

Trapani and Winn (2014) describe the setting of *Gold Rush* as the frontier, and a homo-social environment where women and the domestic sphere have no place. The frontier connects back to archetypes of masculinity that American males grow up with, such as the strong willed cowboy that battles against the elements and an uncivilized chaos (Trapani and Winn, 2014). Mining in the frontier becomes important to the reclamation of masculine power as "discovering gold is ancillary to the central purpose of the show: to effect a reconnection to the symbolic order in which men are once again in charge even if it is because all others have been evacuated from the scene" (p. 185). The presence of females as potential sexual partner or love interests allows for the domestic to reenter this masculinity space resource focused wilderness that is meant to be free of civilization.

Several authors have identified connections with the distinctive masculine identities present in *Deadliest Catch* with the old west, hailing them as cowboys of the Bering Sea (e.g., Buchanan, 2014; Kirby, 2013). Buchanan (2014) also notes the prominence of frontiersmanhsip as the "cowboy spirit is seen in *Deadliest Catch"* (p. 10). This notion suggests that *Deadliest Catch* draws on different archetypes of the Cowboy and Western genre in addition to the classic characteristics of reality television. *Gold Rush* in particular harkens back to imagery and themes from the American gold rush as Trapani and Winn (2014) consider the way in which the "Western is America's most enduring mythical genre", with its vast landscapes and limitless

freedom and possibilities (p. 194). Kirby (2014) argues that *Deadliest Catch* seeks to mythologize these working class people and their identities. It is possible that by attempting to mythologize these people they are also turned into a spectacle that reinforces the distance between the viewer and their identity.

Many different styles of reality television have gained popularity since that 1980s and have become abundant in mainstream television (Grazian, 2010). While there is no industry standard definition of reality television, the similar structure and themes that pervade the genre are recognizable to many viewers. In the genre more broadly, themes of competition, and control reinforce stereotypical representations of hegemonic masculinity and femininity. The normalcy of these gendered roles, and masculine control over nature are reinforced in series such as *Survivor* (Waggoner, 2004). However, the limited studies on natural resource based television focus on fishing, and mining as a way to regain a (perceived to be) lost masculine control, with only passing connections to the way these identities are produced in relation to nature. These studies also begin to discuss the role of American myths, such as the cowboy in the frontier in the narratives of *Deadliest Catch* and *Gold Rush.* The current literature on natural resource based reality television has only singled out specific series rather than considering the genre as a whole, and there is an opportunity to how investigate how these themes of masculinity, nationalism, and the frontier intersect with each other and in relation to the production of nature.

1.3.3. American Westerns

Because there is little researched publish on nature-based reality television, I turned my attention to three themes that are addressed in this literature – masculinities, nationalism, and frontiers – and based on the archetype of the cowboy that was identified in these series I have looked further afield to critical analyses of American Westerns. The Western film genre explores

questions of masculinity, national identity, and frontier narratives through the cycle of repetition and revision of national mythologies (Edgerton and Marsden, 2011). Similarly to *Deadliest Catch* and *Gold Rush* the Western film genre became popular as the Great Depression prompted a "crisis in masculinity" as men were laid off, leaving them unable to provide for their families while women began to enter the public sphere becoming involved in the increasingly feminized service industry (Wel, 2012, p. 208).

The Western film genre as a whole has traditionally focused on the events and actions directly related almost exclusively to White male protagonists (Schwarz, 2014). Isolated in the frontier the male protagonist was free of domestic restrictions (Edgerton and Marsden, 2011). The men were presented as stereotypically hyper-masculinity, with visual queues such as rugged facial hair, or the smoking of cigarettes (Castleberry, 2014). These stories focused on the male protagonist's point of view, and male-male relationships downplayed the importance of women in men's lives (Schwarz, 2014). Additionally, as previously discussed, within media representation, the ideal male and ideal female are often defined in relation to one another (Cavender et al., 1999). As such, the emphasis on hyper-masculinity in the Western genre typically called for women who were "meek and passive, modest and silent" (Mesce, 2001, p. 81).

Within the Western genre the definition of the 'frontier' changed from the European definition of a fixed political and geographical boundary, evolving to refer to the "imaginary line between American civilization and nature, or the uncreated future" (Tibbetts, 2011, p. 46). This idea of the frontier deals with ideas of 'borders,' 'space,' 'homeland,' and 'sovereignty' (Tibbetts, 2011). The frontier becomes a socio-political idea building on American myth and history, with long panoramic shots of the open desert or plains beneath blue skies (Fojas, 2011).

Westerns serve to "endlessly repeat the great triumph of settlers against the hostile wilderness . . . the Western project[ed] a formalized vision of the nation's infinite possibilities and limitless vistas, serving to 'naturalize' the process of westward expansion and Manifest Destiny" (Schatz, 1981, p. 47–48).

In conclusion the new trend in natural resource based reality television represent a new iteration in the way that nature is (re)produced on television that blends together two prominent television genres: wildlife films, and reality television. Research on the wildlife film styles of 'Blue Chip' nature documentaries and host-led television series have shown that while they appear different aesthetically they both contribute to a perceived separation between human and nature (Horak, 2006; Chris, 2006; Brockington, 2009; Huggan, 2013). Horak (2006) questions if the obsession with wildlife life films is in a way an effort to preserve these distant animals and environments in a virtual world. Within this body of knowledge there is a lack of research considering the way that it is predominantly men that are able to enter areas of primeval nature and demonstrate their 'mastery' and control over the wildlife. Research into reality television, the second genre that informs natural resource based reality television, has largely examined ways in which particular gender, and class identities, among others are reinforced (e.g., Negra et al., 2013; Little and Panelli, 2007). Hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity are reinforced through the themes of competition. In some series (e.g., *Survivor)* these gendered roles are normalized as masculine control over an unwieldy nature is reinforced (Waggoner, 2004; Little and Panelli 2007).

The cross-section between nature and identity in nature resource based reality television remains understudied. There are a few studies that consider specific series in the genre, and themes of masculine control, American mythmaking and the frontier (Buchanan, 2014; Trapani

and Winn, 2014). As there is limited research on the way that these themes appear in natural resource based reality television I considered how they appeared in American Westerns. Resource based series may be repeating the national mythologies and identities employed by American Westerns, including an emphasis on white masculine control in a time when masculinity is in crisis while reinforcing American nationalism, and normalizing the process of Western expansion (Wel, 2012; Schatz, 1981). The studies on natural resource based reality television begin to consider the environments that these series take place in, however, the way the themes of masculinity, nationalism, and the frontier intersect and how they are produced in relation to nature across the entire genre must be more fully explored.

1.4. Thesis Structure

This thesis is organized into four chapters. Chapter two describes the methodological approach taken in addressing the research aim and objective. Chapter 3 details the findings from the discourse analysis of 100 different episodes of natural resource based reality television series organized under the three key themes of masculinity, nationalism, and the frontier. Chapter 4 contributions to the broader research by synthesizing these three themes, as they do not exist in isolation from one another, including the way they intersect with productions of nature to inform unique human-environment relations. Chapter 4 continues to provide a summary of this thesis, outline the scholarly contributions, and recommend directions for future research.

Chapter 2. Methods and Research Approach

In her book Visual Methodologies, cultural geographer Gillian Rose refers to John Berger's argument that "we never look just at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves" (Berger (1972) cited in Rose, 2007, p. 8). This argument points to the need for empirical attention on visual imagery, and suggests the potential for feminist visual methods to reveal important perspectives on culture and cultural politics. Informed by Rose and other cultural geographers, this chapter describes and justifies the approach taken to this research and the methods used for data collection and analysis.

2.1. Research Approach

Visual materials can include a diverse range of forms, including film, photography, promotional materials, and art, and each form has different codes, conventions and genres associated with it (Bartram, 2010). With visual materials comprised of moving images, such as film and television, the intersection between the visual and auditory is important to these codes, and conventions as they work together to produce cultural meanings. Audiovisual materials are intimately linked to the production and experience of culture and always produces cultural meanings, as such it is important to engage with them in a critical manner (Bartram, 2010). Of particular interest to geographers are the ways that space, place, and landscape are (re)produced through the use of audiovisual imagery (Bartram, 2010).

When considering different forms of audiovisual imagery there are three sites of concern: (1) the production of the image; (2) the image itself; and (3) the audience (Bartram, 2010; Rose, 2007). Those interested in the site of production would ask questions such as, who commissioned the image, when was it made and when was it broadcast or shown (Bartram, 2010). When considering the site of the image itself the researcher should convey a sense of how the image

works in terms of colour, composition, perspective, tempo, sound, and narrative (Bartram, 2010). In addition to this simple description, the site of the image is also concerned with symbolic elements of the image, and how it relates to other cultural images and ideals (Bartram, 2010). When engaging with the third site, the site of audience interpretation, it is possible to infer how, why, and where audiences engage with audiovisual materials (Bartram, 2010). However, in order to gather a more detailed interpretation of the audience's engagement, methods such as focus groups should be employed in order to question the audience about their own perceptions and interpretations (Bartram, 2010). Rose (2007) discusses how it is essential to acknowledge each of these sites in order to critically engage with visual materials, however it is difficult to engage with each site equally. Attempting to equally research each of the three sites of concern within a single study can result in research that is unable to understand the nuances of any one site (Rose, 2007).

In order to ensure that this research was robust a multi-methods approach was used. The main focus of this research lies in the second site of audiovisual materials, the image itself. Discourse analysis was utilized to conduct a systematic review of 100 different episodes of natural resource based reality television from 15 different series. In addition to this discourse analysis, two focus groups were conducted to address the site of the audience, and to test the validity of the themes that emerged during the discourse analysis.

The primary method used in this research was a discourse analysis on a sample of episodes from the resource based reality television genre. Discourse analysis is an effective method to consider an image and interpret its effects, especially in relation to the productions of social difference (Rose, 2007). In order to successfully complete a discourse analysis you must immerse yourself in the material, reading and re-reading the text, or in this case, watching and

re-watching the videos (Rose, 2007; Berg, 2009). This familiarity allows for the researcher to identify key themes and recurring images (Rose, 2007). Discourse analysis is much more flexible than content analysis (Rose, 2007). Unlike with content analysis, where you must stop your process and begin again with a new set of categories if a new theme or issue becomes important, discourse analysis allows you to return to the material any number of times with different codes (Rose, 2007). Discourse analysis is concerned more with the content and meaning of the audiovisual, rather than the frequency of certain words, etc. (Hardy et al., 2004). Discourse Analysis also discusses the choices that were made in its construction, such as why some materials were emphasized at the expense of others (Rose, 2007; Bauer & Gaskell, 2000a).

The second method, focus groups, addressed the site of the audience. As previously mentioned, it is possible to infer how, why, and where audiences engage with audiovisual materials. However, focus groups allow for a more nuanced insight into the audience's engagement with, and perceptions of different materials (Bartram, 2010). Focus groups are comprised of small groups of people that are able to discuss their opinions with one another allowing for a lively discussion led by a facilitator (Bartram, 2010; Longhurst, 2010). Focus groups are also conducive to the inclusion of activities to further stimulate conversation. For example, it is possible to show short video clips in order to receive initial reactions, and to provide a point of focus for participants to engage with (Bartram, 2010).

Nightingale (2003) recommends a mixed methods approach to allow for thicker and richer research while acknowledging all knowledge is fragmented. Nightingale (2003) discusses how there is no one truth, but rather all truth is partial and situated and analyses of cultural productions are always an interpretation. As such, the discourse analysis, as with other methods, cannot be argued to be the only, true analysis of the material but rather is an interpretation

dependent on the positioning of the viewer (Rose, 2007). The focus groups were meant to be exploratory and their primary purpose was to determine the validity of the themes that emerged in the discourse analysis. They were not meant to be representative of the audience as a whole, but rather were meant to allow for thicker and richer research while acknowledging all knowledge is fragmented (Nightingale, 2003). There were several limitations to the two focus groups that were conducted. The intended audience of these series is an American demographic; and while many Canadians also have access to these series, the Canadian based focus groups were not representative of that specific American audience. This difference is important because it can be understood that there are social and cultural differences that would impact their interpretation of different themes, such as nationalism and patriotism. Because of the limits of these focus groups, I have concentrated on the more robust aspect of my research in my thesis, the discourse analysis (see Appendix A for a full description of the focus groups' methodology and findings).

2.2. Data Collection

There were two phases of data collection that took place, each of which coincide with a method that was used. The first phase of the research focused on collecting a representative sample of episodes from different natural resource extraction based reality television series. The second phase involved a round of focus groups with the target demographic of those series (Detailed in Appendix A). As previously mentioned, in order to ensure that this research was robust these methods were used to address the site of the image itself, and the site of the audience respectively. Each phase of data collection was designed to speak these sites of concern while building on each other to assess the aim of the research. The following section will detail the data collection process for the Discourse Analysis.

In order to complete a discourse analysis a representative sample of different natural resource extraction based reality television was necessary. The sample was selected through four levels of inclusion criteria in order to narrow down the population of series and episodes that were available. As shown in Figure 1.1 the sample was narrowed down at the network level, the series level, the season level, and finally specific episodes were selected. This section will continue to detail specific considerations that were taken at each sampling level.

The sample for this research was drawn from series that have aired on Discovery or National Geographic and their subsidiaries based in the United States of America. While both Discovery and National Geographic have area specific programing and networks that air worldwide (i.e. Discovery Channel Australia) only series that aired in the United States were considered. This was in order to scope and group messages that are received by a specific television audience. Reality television series that focus on nature and resource extraction are also featured on other television networks (e.g., History Channel) but these two networks have a long history of focusing on nature-based programing. Both networks feature multiple natural resource based television series that are part of a larger trend of the representation of nature on television. The focus on nature based programing by these two networks offers insights into how nature is mediated on television.

Discovery was founded in 1985, and is owned by Discovery Communications Inc., a publicly traded company (Discovery, 2016). In addition to Discovery, Discovery

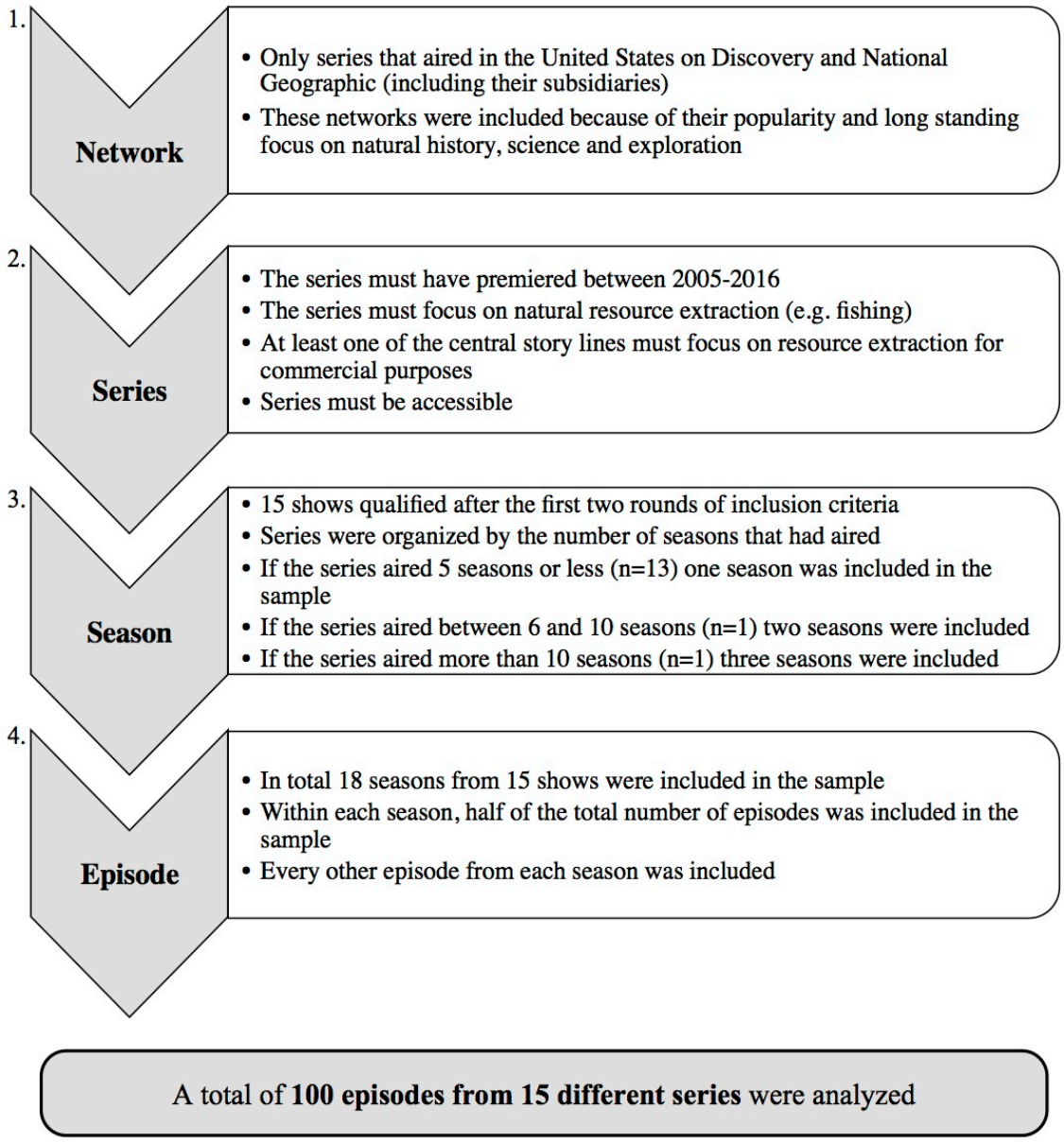

Figure 1.1 Sampling method for Discourse Analysis

Communications Inc. owns at least twenty-four channels that air in more than 220 countries worldwide (Discovery, 2016). As of February 2015, Discovery is available in 96 589 000 homes in the United States, which is approximately 83 percent of households with a television, making it the third most widely distributed cable channel in the United States (Seidman, 2015).

The airing of *Deadliest Catch* on Discovery in 2005, marked the beginning of a trend in resource based reality televisions series. In addition to this Discovery has distinguished itself from other cable networks with its reliance on the documentary form, with a focus on natural history, science and exploration (Chris, 2006). Early in its inception Discovery greatly promoted and relied on the wildlife genre (Chris, 2006). This was likely due to the low cost it took to produce these series, as they required no actors, writers, or sets (Chris, 2006). Additionally, the audiences for these series were relatively reliable, and appealing to advertisers as they were particularly homogenous (Chris, 2006). These series appealed to male viewers aged 25 to 54, which traditionally had been a hard to reach and unpredictable demographic (Chris, 2006). In tracing the evolution of nature on television, Discovery has been a consistent presence and generally has several shows that focus on nature or human-environment relations airing at any given time.

Discovery has had an important role in repositioning nonfiction, and creating new hybrids of reality subgenres, and many other networks have followed in their stead (Chris, 2006). Notably, after Discovery launched the Animal Planet channel, the National Geographic Society[2] created a television network that featured science, nature, environment, and adventure programing stating that, "at National Geographic, we believe in the power of science, exploration and storytelling to change the world" **(**National Geographic, 2016). National Geographic Television was launched in the United States in 2001, and is owned in part by Fox Cable News, a division of 21st Century Fox, and the National Geographic Society (National Geographic, 2016). As of September 9, 2015, 21st Century Fox also acquired the majority share of the National Geographic Magazine (National Geographic Press Room, 2015). As of February 2015, National

[2] The National Geographic Society is a global non-profit organization. Its focuses include geography, natural science, and the promotion of environmental and historical conservation around the world (National Geographic, 2016).

Geographic is available in 86 144 000 homes in the United States, which is approximately 74 percent of households with a television, approximately 10 000 000 fewer homes than Discovery (Seidman, 2015).

The first level of sampling criteria outlined that only series from Discovery and National Geographic would be included in the sample. The next stage in selecting a sample was to determine which specific series would be included. An Internet based-data review was conducted in order to construct a database of viable television series for this research. The information for the database was collected from a number of public sources. In order to be included in this database the series must have premiered between March 2005 and April 2016[3]. March 2005 marks the airdate of *Deadliest Catch*, which can be pointed to as the beginning of the trend in natural resource based reality television series. Additionally, the series must be a reality show with a focus on nature. These series were then further narrowed down to focus exclusively on natural resource extraction based reality television series.

The official Discovery website, and National Geographic website were searched for reality television series that encompassed a resource (e.g. logging, fishing, mining), as well as third party sites such as Internet Movie Data Base (IMDb), and TV.com. Basic information about the series was found by searching keywords (e.g., *Deadliest Catch* Production Company) on Google. Much of this information came from IMDb, which was then cross-checked with other online sources in order to verify it. This search helped to insure that series that were included had met the previous criteria. In addition, series were only considered if at least one of the central storylines focused on resource extraction for commercial purposes. For Example, Discovery's

[3] An entire season of a television series qualified if any of the episodes aired in this timeline. For example Season 12 of Deadliest Catch began airing in April 2016, so the 12th season was included in the database.

Pacific Warriors features subsistence and trophy fishers, but they also have two running storylines focusing on commercial fishing, so it was included in the sample. National Geographic's *Big Bad Wood* features logging, but these urban loggers cut down trees in cities for homeowners and municipalities, they are not logging in order to sell timber, so it was excluded from the sample.

There were 20 different series that met the criteria at the series level of sampling (premiered between 2005-2016, and focused on commercial natural resource extraction). Of these 20 series only 15[4] were included in the sample. Five shows were excluded largely due to unavailability. The series that were included, were collected through digital downloads from iTunes, or from hard copies of DVDs. In some cases, likely due to a lack of popularity, some series were not available through either of these formats, nor were they available to stream through Discovery or National Geographic's website (e.g., Discovery's *Lobster Wars*). Between series on Discovery (n=11) and series on National Geographic series (n=4) six focused on fishing, seven focused on mining, and two focused on logging.

After selecting 15 series that met the inclusion criteria, these series were then organized by the number of seasons they had aired. These series were divided into three groups: (1) series that had aired 5 seasons or less (n=13); (2) series that had aired between 6 and 10 seasons (n=1); and (3) series that had aired more than 10 seasons (n=1). Presumably, the number of years that a

[4] Discovery's *Backyard Oil* was included in this sample of 15 different series. I should note that this series largely existed as an outlier and is mostly absent from the following findings chapter. This show featured 'secret millionaires' who struck it rich by drilling for oil in their backyard or other land they owned. The people on this show were presented more as caricatures of southern men rather than the heroic depictions that were present on other series. Little focus is given to the environment more broadly, or on nature as a barrier between them and their success. When viewed as part of a larger television programing schedule the departure from the themes of other series could in part be due to the tradition in the US to feature half hour-long comedies while the hour-long format is utilized by dramas. *Backyard Oil* is the only half an hour-long series sampled.

series has been on the air is directly linked to its popularity. A series in its 10th season is likely more popular than a series that was cancelled after only one season. Not only are longer running series more popular, but viewers align themselves more with messages on television over time (Huggan, 2013). Therefore longer running series and the messages they communicate have a stronger impact on the audience. If the series aired 5 seasons or less (n=13) one randomly selected season was included in the sample. If the series aired between 6 and 10 seasons (n=1) two seasons were included in the sample. If the series aired more than 10 seasons (n=1) three seasons were included in the sample. In order to determine if the messages on a single series changed over time, when multiple seasons of a single series were sampled they were chosen from earlier and later series. This was done by randomly selecting a season from the first half of a series' run, and randomly selecting a season from the second half of a series' run[5].

This sampling method resulted in a total of 18 different seasons of television distributed over eleven years. In order to avoid theoretical saturation only half of the episodes within any given season of a series were included, rounded up in the case of an odd number of episodes. Theoretical saturation is referring to the point that is reached when the same questions are being asked without receiving any new answers (Nightingale, 2003). Every other episode of each season, adjusted in order to include the premiere and finale, was included to follow any season long story arcs. This resulted in a sample of 100 episodes of television from 15 different series (See Appendix B for a breakdown of which series and episodes were sampled). Section 2.3. Data Analysis of this chapter detail how the discourse analysis was performed, and how each episode was analyzed.

[5] Or in the case of a series with three season included in the sample, the first third, second third, and last third of the series' run

2.3. Data Analysis

The data collected from the sample of natural resource extraction based reality television series, and the focus groups was analyzed in order to fulfill Objective 3, To *critically analyze how human-environment relations are mediated, and with what effect.* The two phases of data collection were subsequently analyzed in two phases of data analysis, with the emergent themes from phase 1 informing the codes in phase 2. The data in both phase 1 and 2 were coded in order to understand the messages mediated by resource extraction based reality television series, and to find patterns across the series, and in the way nature is (re)produced (Cope, 2010). The computer program NVivo was utilized to assist in managing large quantities of data and to support the analysis of the qualitative data (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000b). Computer assisted coding allows the data analysis to be more systematic, transparent, and rigorous and allows it to be very clear how the codes were created (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000b).

2.3.1. Discourse Analysis

The first phase of data analysis was a discourse analysis of the sample of 100 different episodes from 15 different series that was outlined in the section on 2.2 Data Collection. To begin the discourse analysis each episode was labeled with the series they came from, the network they aired on, the year they aired, the resource featured, and their season and episode number. Entering these categories into NVivo made it much easier to compare how and if themes change across resource, network, etc. For the first round of analysis, I watched every sample episode from each series. During this first viewing I took notes of the different themes that emerged throughout. This first viewing allowed me to gain a sense of familiarity with the data, to understand season long story arcs, and to establish some of the themes that reoccurred throughout. These notes included the series name, episode number, episode title, original airdate,

as well as the official episode synopsis, my own episode description, and some keywords that describe the episode. The notes themselves were organized into two columns, with a timestamp on the left, and the notes themselves on the right (Appendix C). Including the timestamp allowed me to quickly determine what the note referred to in each episode, and to easily revisit them at a later time. Following the rounds of coding that I will discuss next, these notes were also added into NVivo, linked with the episode itself, and coded in order to better identity and understand the intersections of different themes.

After watching all the sampled episodes in a season of a series, the episodes were entered into NVivo. A challenge of analyzing audiovisual forms of imagery is how to determine the unit of analysis (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007). "The unit of analysis refers to each segment of audiovisual data that will be examined and coded (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007, p. 243). The filming styles of the different series were not consistent across the genre, for example some series utilized narration while others did not. Additionally, pacing was inconsistent; some shows featured much faster breaks than others and more rapid scene changes or had speech (from a narrator or 'character') tying together disparate camera shots. There are many ways to select a unit of analysis but this research primarily followed the common practice of breaking down audiovisual imagery into scene changes that were coded as units of analysis, but the length of these units was variable throughout and across series (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007).

After determining the way I would define a unit of analysis the first phase of coding in NVivo categorized emergent themes across the 15 different series (i.e. nationalism, representations of resources, attitudes towards nature) (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). This round of coding was guided by information gathered in the initial viewing of different series, as well as themes in different types of television series that were discussed in the relevant literature. For

example, during the initial viewing I noticed that nature was often personified, and became a character. I also noted that nature was presented as gendered, and was depicted as female or feminine. Because of this I coded for ways nature is represented, with sub-themes of personified, and feminized. Looking for words such as 'mother nature' and feminine pronouns helped to signify this theme. In the first round of coding I grouped together different themes under main codes (e.g., Nationalism, ways Nature is represented, Regulations, Family, Gender, Resource, Markets, Ethics, etc.), which each had sub-themes (e.g., the theme of regulations had the sub-themes of regulatory bodies, attitudes towards, on resource, and environmental).

A second round of analytic coding was preformed after the completion of the focus groups in order to find deeper nuances and meanings in the broad categories. This round of coding narrowed down the number of themes that were considered, focusing on the overarching themes codes of Ways Nature is represented, Gender, Nationalism, and Resource. This round of coding primarily considered units of analysis that had been identified under these themes in the first round of coding. This was done in order to understand how the prominent themes on these series (i.e. Nationalism, masculinities, the frontier) compare to previous iterations of the (re)production of nature on television, which assisted in the understanding of how this specific genre mediates human-environment relations. For example, under the theme of gender I asked *are stories defined from the point of view of a male?* Or *are the displays of masculinity visual (e.g., 'rugged', smoking, etc.)*. I then considered ways that these themes intersected with one another largely in terms of the frontier, as the synthesis of these themes remained largely absent from the reviewed literature.

Within each group of similar codes both the audio and visual components of the units of analysis were coded. The moving imagery shown on the screen worked in tandem with the audio

(e.g. narration, character commentary, music) to produce different themes. In place of moving images Chapter 3: Findings uses still screen captures to convey a sense of the visual aspects of these series. These images are mostly used to highlight what was being shown on screen during particular quotes, or to show the visual range present within the genre. In some cases quotes are used without accompanying screen captures, for several reasons. For example, the quote may extend over a series of images that are unrelated to the quote, or similar screen captures have already been utilized for a theme and additional images will not contribute further to the understanding of particular themes. Additionally, not all themes are conveyed equally through the audio and visual, as sometimes one component is more telling than the other.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter sought to outline the methodological approach and research design applied in this thesis. The primary focus of this research is the site of the image itself, with auxiliary research into the site of the audience. Descriptions and justifications for the use of discourse analysis to consider the site of the image were presented in regards to data collection, and data analysis. Focus groups were used to ensure that the themes that arose in the discourse analysis were robust. For details of the data collection, data analysis, and findings from the focus groups see Appendix A. The following chapters will present the primary findings regarding the main themes of masculinity, nationalism, and the frontier, followed by a discussion of the scholarly contributions, limitations, and further areas of research.

Chapter 3. Findings

Despite its popularity and 'real life' characters, reality television is often criticized for a lack of authenticity (Negra et al., 2013). These series are viewed as highly edited for entertainment and there are many processes behind the camera, and in the editing room, that the viewer is not privy to. While they focus on the stories of real people they are produced, in the literal sense that they have producers that construct stories from footage of real people, and the presented stories are altered by their appearance in media (Cupples, 2014). These processes of production raise questions about how and why identity based tropes are made integral to telling 'real' stories about primary resource sectors and the people who work in them. Through these production processes the people on these shows become characters, and the final product exists largely out of their control. This findings section will detail commonalities in the ways that editing and production processes assemble particular types of imagery and narrative tropes across the series in the natural resource based reality television genre.

This chapter outlines the findings of my research. It is separated into three main sections in order to address my third objective *to critically analyze how human-environment relations are mediated, and with what effect.* The first section addresses the way that masculinities mediate human-environment relations. This includes how masculine identities are presented and how they interact with a feminized nature. The second section addresses the way that nationalism mediates human-environment relations. The third section focuses on how the frontier, as a unique intersection of masculinities and American nationalism, alters human-environment relations.

3.1. Masculinities and A Feminine Nature

This section will explore the theme of masculinities and how it becomes in integral to telling stories about resource extractive environments. First, this section explores the way that masculine identities and tropes are central to the narratives in this particular genre. Second, this section will summarize how women navigate these hyper masculine environments, and how gender is presented as a dualism in which the masculinity of characters is defined against the femininity of others. Third, this section explores how nature is depicted as feminine and how the resource based reality genre conveys messages about how men working in the primary sector define their masculinity by controlling a feminized nature. In part this is done by mediating messages around the notion that masculine control is more easily achieved by devaluing nature by feminizing and either sexualizing or commoditizing it.

3.1.1. Masculine Identities and Tropes

Masculinity is a pervasive theme across the 15 different television series on Discovery and National Geographic. Characters in these series, primarily men working in the primary sector, display hyper masculine identities. There was only a single female out of the 19 captains who were featured on series focused primarily on fishing[6]. Even when women appeared across the different series they were frequently featured in relation to male characters (e.g., wives, mothers, daughters) or their identities were defined against those of male characters.

[6] Captain Linda on the second season of Discovery's *Swords: Life on the Line* is the only featured captain.

3.1.1.1. Masculinity as Bravery

This genre utilizes several different tropes to convey how masculinity emerges and is embodied in these environments. Of all the series that were sampled 14[7] convey that only the toughest, bravest men can survive these jobs in the remote wilderness. As Wild Bill, captain of the Kodiak on *Deadliest Catch* says, "you gotta to have a certain degree of toughness to even attempt to do this job" (Deadliest Catch, 8x14, 5:53[8]). Figure 3.1 shows Wild Bill, and the young greenhorn[9] that he hopes will improve and learn quickly enough to continue to work on his boat. On Discovery's *Gold Rush* one man shares this sentiment about what it takes to work in the primary sector saying, "you've got to have a pair of balls you know" (Gold Rush, 2x19, 16:05). On these series men are depicted as following the mantra of "no guts, no glory", as they brave the wilderness, willing to take a risk to come home victorious (Deadliest Catch, 8x08, 40:00). A crew leader on *Gold Rush* says of their efforts to mine in Guyana, "We'll either come home heroes or go down in flames, and we wouldn't have it any other way" (Gold Rush, 4x01, 3:00). By featuring characters that take chances on challenging hostile, unpredictable, and unknown landscapes -- and survive doing so -- this genre reinforces the notion that masculinity is something to be proven (rather than inherent).

[7] The one series that the trope masculinity as bravery was not present in was *Backyard Oil* which was discussed in the previous chapter as an outlier

[8] In the format 8x14, the first number signifies the season number, and the second signifies the episode number of a particular series

[9] a greenhorn is someone who is new or inexperienced

Figure 3.1. Wild Bill (left) of *Deadliest Catch* discussing a new greenhorn (right), and how you need to be tough to be a crab fisher (Deadliest Catch, 8x14, 5:54; 5:59)

3.1.1.2. From Boy to Man

Across each of the three resources (fishing, mining, and logging) this genre communicates that these resource extractive environments are central to a youth's growth into manhood. In this genre 'becoming a man' is constituted through risk and exposure to danger through their work in natural resource extraction. When younger men are able to survive the trials of these environments they are rewarded with the acknowledgement of their superiors and peers reinforcing the notion that masculinity is earned in these dangerous environments. Working in these areas almost becomes a right of passage that is integral to embodying the image of hyper masculinity that is portrayed in these series. For example, Captain Johnathon Hillstrand from *Deadliest Catch* speaks about a young 18 year old that has come onto his boat straight out of high school when he says, "That's the greatest thing that could have happened to that kid, he's going to go home and be a man" (Deadliest Catch, 12x16, 9:43). This suggests that the young crewmember would not have been able to grown into a man outside of the primary sector environment.

This trope appears frequently across both Discovery and National Geographic series, for example on *Deadliest Catch,* a show focused on fishing, when a senior member of the

Northwestern is discussing a young man on the crew he says, "we've seen Jake grow up a lot from a young punk kid, he's a man" (Deadliest Catch, 8x12, 37:00). Also on Discovery, *American Loggers,* a show focused on the logging industry, features a description of a young lumber truck driver in which an older man says, "if he can keep up with Allen, we can make a good man out of him yet" (American Loggers, 3x01, 10:15). A short while later in the same episode Andrew, a veteran in the Pelletier Brothers logging company (the focus of the show), says of the younger crew members, most of which are family, "I call them kids but they're not kids, they are young men, and they probably call me an old fart" (American Loggers, 3x01, 17:00). On the National Geographic series *Big Fish Texas* Kenny is captaining a boat about to leave port to catch red snappers, with his young nephew aboard for the first time. Of his nephew Kenny says, "there are no kids out on the Gulf of Mexico. If you're on the deck, you're a man. You have man responsibilities" (Big Fish Texas, 1x08, 15:37).

There are also several examples of this trope on series focused on mining activities. On the fourth season of Discovery's *Gold Rush*, Parker who has been featured since the series' second season, now 18, leaves his family's mine in Porcupine Creek, Alaska, and travels to the Yukon. There Parker leases land from legendary miner Tony, heading his own crew and hoping to mine a million dollars worth of gold before the winter forces an end to the mining season. Tony says of Parker "either he's going to stay a boy or be a man in the Yukon" (Gold Rush, 4x16, 41:02). After serving as Parker's mentor and pushing him throughout the season, Tony reflects back saying, "I don't know if he left a f*** man but he's getting close to it, let's put it there" (Gold Rush, 4x18, 32:45). Figure 3.2 features two images comparing young Parker, who hopes to grow into a man, and Tony, who presumably already is one. Similar to the images in Figure 3.1, the older seasoned captains both appear more rugged with fuller beards, and more deeply set

wrinkles while the younger men are either clean shaven or minimally scruffy. It seems that these visual queues of ruggedness covey aspects of the characters' identities, visually communicating their masculinity and experience.

Figure 3.2. Parker (left) and Tony (right) of *Gold Rush* (Gold Rush, 4x18, 34:04; 32:55)

3.1.1.3. Precarious Masculinities

The characters in this genre also measure their masculinity through competition with the other men on the crews**.** Figure 3.3 shows the deck of a boat on *Deadliest Catch* where a push up competition is taking place between two men. This scene also featured the man on the right moving and throwing 800 pound crab pots on his own. This competition acts as a way to measure the men's strength as they challenge one another. The crewmembers must rely on each other when they enter into dangerous and hostile landscapes and challenging one another may be a way to ensure that each member of the crew is able to conquer these landscapes. As men must continually prove themselves, it suggests that their masculinity in these resource extractive environments is precarious, and subject to failure.

Figure 3.3. Two men having a push up competition on the deck of the Saga on *Deadliest Catch* (Deadliest Catch, 12x10, 3:11)

Across this genre there are a number of cases wherein young men do not live up to the standards of masculinity reinforced through various storylines. Generally on these series, when a man fails to prove his masculinity he is met with negative responses from his peers and competitors. Characters falling outside of the boundaries of masculinity that this genre conceptualizes are often mocked and associated with children or women rather than men. On Discovery's *Bering Sea Gold* Dave Riedel takes out a restraining order on Scott, the captain of the dredge Anchor Management, because he perceives him as a physical threat, largely due to his anger problems. Scott feels that Dave is not acting as a man should, saying, "Who puts a stalking restraining order on another man, He's a p***… It's silly and childish, he could have just taken it like a man" (Bering Sea Gold, 2x03, 27:27).

On *Gold Rush* when Dakota Fred's son disagrees with his decisions about where they should mine, he seeks to emasculate him saying, "I don't know what Dustin's problem is today, mad as a woman" (Gold Rush, 2x14, 14:24). This draws on the stereotypical dichotomy in which women, and femininity are depicted as emotional, while men are viewed as rational. On Discovery's *Alaska: Battle on the Bay* Captain Tom says about his crew "if you want to play with the big boys you have to put your long pants on and leave your feelings at home" (Alaska:

Battle on the Bay, 1x06, 27:00). Similarly, a veteran captain on *Deadliest Catch* says of his decision-making, "if I need them to go faster there's a reason for it. It's not just because I'm doing it from emotions, it's because I do it with reason" (Deadliest Catch, 8x06, 7:40). Dangerous resource extractive environments are depicted as wild and unpredictable, and therefore it takes a clear and level head to navigate them safely. While the theme of precarious masculinity and competition appear in series featuring mining, fishing, and logging environments, they are much more commonly featured on Discovery than they are in the sample of National Geographic series.

Characteristics associated with masculinity, such as rationality, are depicted as integral to surviving and taming the wilderness, while more emotional feminine characteristics have no place in these environments. Figure 3.4 shows Parker, a young man, standing with his legs spread widely, looking forward confidently on his mining equipment. This image from the opening credits of *Gold Rush* has Parker standing in the centre of the frame, the clear focus, with ownership and authority in front of the Alaskan wilderness. It becomes important to continually prove one's masculinity through shows of strength and confidence in order to both gain entrance to and remain in these remote wild regions.

Figure 3.4. Parker of *Gold Rush* standing on his mining equipment (Gold Rush, 4x01, 3:12)

3.1.2. The Appearance/Role of Women

As previously discussed, within media representations of gender, the ideal male and ideal female are often defined in relation to one another (Little and Panelli, 2007). Women rarely appear on resource based series, but if femininity and masculinity are defined against one another, then findings regarding femininity inform the way that hegemonic masculinity is represented in these series. If these series often serve to reproduce stereotypically masculine identities, what happens when women do appear? How do they navigate these masculine spaces?

While no women are featured on the crews of the two logging series, several women appear on different mining and fishing series. Women often appear and are emphasized through their connection to a specific 'male' character, for example as a love interest, spouse, or family member. When women appear in these primary sector environments as spouses or potential romantic partners they are often received poorly. These women are seen to not belong in these spaces; this is particularly true on mining focused shows[10]. One notable exception to this role is Kimi, a kayak fisher on Discovery's *Pacific Warriors.* In addition to the storyline following

[10] It is also considered unlucky to have a woman on a boat according to superstition

commercial kayak fishers in Hawaii, *Pacific Warriors* also features a story line following Kimi, a spear subsistence kayak fisher (Figure 3.5). Each of the season long stories in *Pacific Warriors* are isolated from one another, though they normally follow a pair of kayakers. Kimi fishes alone and her story is unique in its isolation from both the spaces of commercial fishing and any other fishers.

Figure 3.5. Kimi free diving on *Pacific Warriors* fishing for octopus (Pacific Warriors, 1x01, 11:04)

In *Gold Rush* tensions arise when one crewmember's girlfriend appears, distracting him from his job. The team leader grows angry as he waits for him to finish the repairs they need to continue mining, finally he exclaims, "this ain't a love story, it's a freaking gold mine" (Gold Rush, 2x07, 21:30). The team leader reacts negatively as the line between the domestic sphere and the masculine space of the gold mine blur. The first season of National Geographic's *Yukon Gold* features Ken, a miner with a streak of bad luck struggling to find gold, who is unexpectedly visited by his wife. Earlier in the season she is described as "busting his balls," and is painted as a villain to Ken's aspirations, due to her hatred of mining (Yukon Gold, 1x03, 6:30). She arrives on the site to do the accounting for Ken in the sixth episode of the season and finds that they are quickly losing money. While there, she paints and spruces up Ken's trailer, which is viewed as a

nuisance. Eventually, she leaves as she can no longer watch Ken continue to come up short in his clean ups[11].

The presence of females as potential sexual partners or love interests allows for the domestic sphere to reenter this masculine space of resource focused wilderness that is meant to be free of civilization. However, women are not always depicted in this way. A notable exception is on *Gold Rush*, with Tony and his wife. As previously mentioned, Tony is a veteran miner and legend in the Yukon who is portrayed as a periphery 'character' in Parker's[12] storyline. Near the end of the season when Parker grows desperate to reach his season total, he goes to Tony for help in finding men that are still willing to work so late in the season. It is Tony's wife, Minnie, who suggests that Tony help Parker himself. During the exchange between the three of them, the camera momentarily focuses on a sticker in the background that reads, "I'm the boss because my wife said I could be" (Gold Rush, 4x18, 26:45). It seems that Tony is already a legend and does not feel as great a pressure to prove his masculinity or dominance.

It is also common for a woman to appear through an alternate familial connection, generally to the captain or team leader. A woman is more likely to be accepted by the crews if they are the mother, or daughter of a captain. On *Yukon Gold,* Ken's mother makes an appearance on the mine site in the third episode of the first season. While Ken's wife was met with resistance his mother is welcomed as she assists him in cleaning his gold, separating it from other worthless materials. Ken's mother is elevated because of the importance of her skill in this field (Yukon Gold, 1x03, 2:00) (Figure 3.6). It is also noteworthy that this is featured in the same

[11] Large amounts of gold bearing soil is run through a wash plant to separate the dirt from the gold and other heavy material. After running the wash plant a concentrate is cleaned further to separate out the gold, this process is known as the clean up.
[12] Parker is the young crew leader on Gold Rush who goes to mine in the Yukon under Tony's mentorship

episode where a crewmember later describes Ken's wife as "busting his balls" (Yukon Gold, 1x03, 6:30). Sig, a captain of the Northwestern, on *Deadliest Catch,* and Vernon, the owner of several boats on *Bering Sea Gold*, both have their daughters on their teams at some point in their tenure on their respective series. These women exist in a grey area between full acceptance and rejection in these spaces. Growth from 'girl to woman' is not a particular focus of concern for characters; but, at the same time, the wives and girlfriends that do traverse these spaces are often the focus of resistance or other forms of negative attention.

Figure 3.6. Ken's mother Liz helping him clean the gold he has mined (Yukon Gold 1x03, 2x32)

It is rare for a woman to be placed in a position of power on these series, as I mentioned previously there is only a single female captain. Captain Linda is the captain of the Bjorn II on the second season of Discovery's *Swords: Life on the Line.* Linda is a veteran captain, and has been fishing different types of fish for 30 years, however her last season was described as a disaster. Starting a new season with a new boat, Linda feels that she has something to prove, even mentioning that if this season goes poorly she may give up swordfishing altogether (Swords: Life on the Line, 2x01). Linda seems to be the only veteran captain who felt that they

needed to prove themselves to their crew[13]. It is note worthy that when faced with a disruptive, dangerous, or ineffective crewmember other captains, veterans and rookies alike, will simply fire those crew members despite personal ties that may exist. However, when Linda is presented with a crewmember who attempts to form a mutiny she allows him to stay on the boat after it fails to gain traction (Swords: Life on the Line, 2x08, 31:00) (Figure 3.7). Rather than becoming angry, Linda takes the responsibility of her crewmember's inability to hack it on the fishing boat. In her talking head[14] Linda says, "there is no shame in saying this is not for me, its not for everyone, its not for most people. I can't put that on Dave, I hired him" (Swords: Life on the Line, 2x10, 29:30). Linda also uses language that normalizes fishing boats as masculine spaces, such as "It's

Figure 3.7. Images shown on screen while Captain Linda (left) discusses how Dave (right) is planning a mutiny on *Swords: Life on the Line* (2x08, 31:29)

a battle of one fish and one man, this time the man won but sometimes the fish wins. " (Swords: Life on the Line, 2x03, 8:00). She also continues to pit man/humans against nature, showing that women in these spaces also have the agency to separate themselves from and act against nature, as their male peers do.

[13] Rookie captains often faced similar scenarios as they tried to prove themselves but were met with disrespect on other shows, e.g. Elliot Reese captain of the Rambling Rose on season 8 of *Deadliest Catch*

[14] Talking Heads are commonly used in reality television shows. Generally the camera focuses on the head and shoulders of a person as they address the camera specifically, speaking with little to no action. Characters are likely prompted by questions from producers in these segments.

3.1.3. Nature as Feminine

This genre displays how these different gendered identities exist within gendered spaces. The spaces in which these identities are enacted are not a passive backdrop to the stories that are being told. Across the genre, 12 series frequently portray nature as an additional character that seems to act with agency, often working against the different crews. This representation of nature as having agency can be seen in phrases such as "Mother nature steps in and takes things away from us" (American Loggers, 3x08, 5:00), "if you've got a weak spot, the Bering Sea will find it" (Deadliest Catch, 8x03, 0:20), "me and the great Bering sea do not get along" (Bering Sea Gold, 2x06, 9:56), or "the mountains don't want us here" (Ice Cold Gold, 1x01, 25:30). Nature is not seen as a passive backdrop to the stories of these crews, but rather acts against them as they attempt to conquer it, and assert their masculinity while attempting make money.

In seven of the sampled series in the resource based reality television genre the masculinity of the characters on the screen is also frequently highlighted and defined against a feminized nature. This genre utilizes several different dichotomies (e.g., man/woman, human/nature) in order to tell stories about working in the primary sector. For example, in Discovery's *Ice Cold Gold,* a show focused on a group of Americans mining in Greenland, one miner states, "Greenland is like a woman, incredibly beautiful but at the same time there is the potential for sheer terror" (Ice Cold Gold, 1x01, 39:50). This genre feminizes Nature through the use of feminine pronouns and by describing it with many traditional and stereotypical gendered characteristics. For example, this genre often utilizes idea that femininity is associated with unpredictability or fickleness to construct the 'character' of Nature. This is seen when the narrator of *American Loggers* states that, "Mother Nature has been a fickle friend all year" (American Loggers, 3x10, 1:13), and a character on *Alaska: Battle on the Bay* says, "you can't

predict mother nature" (Alaska: Battle on the Bay, 1x03, 36:00). It should be noted that these series do also feature beautiful and calm shots of sunsets and sunrises. However, these images are mostly used as transition shots as the series is entering or returning from a commercial, and they rarely feature any humans (Figure 3.8).

Figure 3.8 An image of calm and beautiful nature devoid of humans after a commercial break (left) and waves crashing against the Wizard moments later as humans enter the scene (right) (Deadliest Catch, 8x01, 38:14; 38:18)

As previously mentioned, a reoccurring theme in this genre is Mother Nature as an adversary, a character working against and challenging the crews. While this is the most common production there are other representations of Mother Nature that arise. Mother Nature is sometimes produced as an entity that needs to be respected, on *Deadliest Catch* Keith was upset with the way a young crew member was not taking the danger the Bering Sea presents seriously, saying "he has no respect for the Bering Sea" (Deadliest Catch, 8x08, 1:05:30). Similarly, at the close of the crab season on the first season of *Deadliest Catch* one crew offers up a gesture of respect to the Bering Sea, as the narrator describes, "the crew leaves a bounty for the sea, leaving the last pot behind" (Deadliest Catch, 1x10, 28:30). Alternatively, on National Geographic's *Wicked Tuna* a captain of one of the Bluefin tuna fishing vessel describes his catch saying that he "snuck in while Mother Nature wasn't looking and stole a fish, time to go before the worst of the storm hits us" (Wicked Tuna, 3x03, 14:55). Mother Nature has apparently been duped while her

back was turned, as the captain boasts about his catch making Mother Nature seem foolish. Though the way Mother Nature is discussed varies the underlying processes are similar. By representing nature as something to be overcome in order to collect a bounty, this genre portrays humans as separate from and holding dominion over nature. This also serves to distance the audience from the impacts of resource extraction as nature remains in the purview of humans, a resource to be used rather than a complex system.

3.1.4. The Sexualization of Nature

A central theme depicted across this genre is masculine control over nature, one method to demonstrate this control is through the sexualization of nature. Language that is used in this genre both personifies and feminizes nature, often then continuing further to sexualize it. This includes language such as "virgin ground," "stripping", "gold bearing soil", and "plunge hole" which are used most frequently on series with a focus on mining. In some cases while the different terms that are used have legitimate definitions within these fields, they have a different connotation and understandings within popular culture. As these series are likely edited together in a purposeful way to appear to the viewer it is important to consider how the audience would receive the terms used across the genre. How would the audience understand phases such as 'glory hole', or 'honey hole'. Both of the sampled seasons of *Gold Rush* have a team attempting to mine a 'glory hole' (a glory hole is a slang term for a hole in the wall through which people can engage in sexual acts[15]). As the series explains, in mining, a 'glory hole' is an ancient buried waterfall at the bottom of which it is likely that the heavier gold will have settled. As gold will sit at the bottom of the waterfall, there is a high chance that if a team reaches the bedrock in the

[15] For more information on the use and function of a glory hole see urbandictionary.com, a crowd sourced online dictionary for slang terms, or Tikkanen, R. H. (2014). Glory Hole. In *Cultural Encyclopedia of the Penis.* (pp. 78-80). London, UK: Rowan & Littlefield

glory hole they stand to make a fortune. However, while this seems to be an accepted term it also creates many instances where the audience may interpret the dialogue as a sexual innuendo. For example, one crew brings in a large piece of drilling machinery to determine if they are close to hitting bedrock. The drill operator manages to get the drill stuck in the glory hole, as he attempts to pull it out he says, "I'm going to try to pull my steel out and go back in… It's stuck pretty good" (Gold Rush, 4x03, 33:15). However, many of these comments may be considered sexual at the audience's discretion, as the people on screen seem unconcerned with the sexual connotation, particularly in this scenario when their expensive equipment is in danger of breaking.

'Honey hole' (a slang term for vagina[16]) is another example of a widely used term, both in fishing and mining shows. A 'honey hole' is an area that yields a lot of a specific valued resource, but is also used in a more sexualized way in popular culture. The term is used on fishing shows such as *Pacific Warriors,* and *Big Fish Texas,* and on mining shows such as *Bering Sea Gold.* On *Bering Sea Gold* Vernon is forced to briefly abandon his honey hole to make repairs to his dredge. As the honey hole is in the public mining area he is unable to place a claim on it, the narrator says, "his hot spot is now ripe for the taking", and as another miner heads out to Vernon's spot he says, "we're going to go rape the ranger hole" [17] (Bering Sea Gold, 2x06, 20:50). On *Big Fish Texas* while several fishermen use the term Kenny says "we need a spot, people call them honey holes, but I just call them places" (Big Fish Texas, 1x01, 21:05) which may indicate an understanding of it as a sexual term.

[16] See urbandictionary.com
[17] In this particular phase ranger hole is used rather than honey hole, as Vernon's dredge is named the Wild Ranger

Through the sexualization and often demeaning of a feminized nature this genre reinforces the dominance of masculinity over the environment. This reclamation of masculine control is furthered through the use of innuendos, often in a more comical way. These jokes are often focused around the penis, reinforcing a heteronormative expression of masculine control. On *Deadliest Catch* when Sig is jealous of the size of another boat someone says he has "deck envy" (Deadliest Catch, 1x06, 20:30). Other examples include phases such as, "nothing comes between Chad and his wood" (American Loggers, 3x08, 3:50) or '[hauling full pots of crab] would give any crab fisher a boner" (Deadliest Catch, 8x03, 19:00).

There is also a recurring theme of a feminized nature being more exciting or only having value if it is untouched. On National Geographic's *Mine Hunters* while mining a new claim in Greenland one crewmember says, "to be able to get onto a piece of land that's untouched. It's interesting, it's exciting, it's everything a miner wants" (Mine Hunters, 1x03, 4:05). This language arises more commonly within television series that are focused on mining, than on logging or fishing, though it is not exclusive to the mining focused shows. In season four of *Gold Rush*, a crew goes down to Guyana to mine hoping to strike it rich, they find the ground on their claim had been mined previously to which Dave says, "we've got somebody's old garbage pit, we were told that we were coming down to mine virgin ground" (Gold Rush, 4x06, 20:15). By emphasizing the importance of untouched earth this genre reinforces the idea that once mined nature loses all value.

Land is represented as more valuable if it is a virgin claim, untouched by others, because there are resources available to be extracted and monetized. However, if the resources prove to be too difficult to extract, the area is also spoken of negatively. This notion is repeated several times in *Gold Rush* as the Amazon proves too difficult for the crew to mine, they express their

frustration saying, “This place does not give up its gold easily”, and “This jungle just doesn’t give it up easily” (Gold Rush, 4x10, 30:29; Gold Rush, 4x06, 17:13). It seems that a feminized nature is not exempt from falling into a dichotomy of the Madonna and the whore. Also of note is how the crew from *Ice Cold Gold* who after managing to find rubies in a hail mary effort after switching from prospecting gold to rubies, says, “Greenland finally gave us something, she gave us just a taste. There now go home and think about me all winter” (Ice Cold Gold, 1x06, 31:59). This demonstrates how Greenland is able reach an ideal balance between the Madonna/whore dualism.

3.1.5. The Commodification of Nature

Across the genre, commoditizing nature and reducing it to a monetary value acts as a way to exert masculine control and ownership over nature. In 13 of the 15 series sampled this genre produces nature as a commodity and a thing, rather than something that is alive, or in a more holistic way. For example, while referring to a table full of crab, one captain says, “It’s a good feeling, seeing all that money on the table” (Deadliest Catch, 12x06, 7:14). By referring to the crab simply as money, he offers a representation of the crab that is devoid of any environmental or social systems within which it exists. This sentiment is echoed over and over again. On *Alaska: Battle on the Bay* the narrator says, “the slippery bonanza of ten dollar bills continues” when referring to sockeye salmon, later going on to say “the salmon run in smaller schools, and finding these thin seams of red gold is often about luck” (Alaska: Battle on the Bay, 1x03, 24:20; 1x08, 18:16). In *Alaska: Battle on the Bay* the Sockeye salmon fishery allows fishing in order to avoid over population, however those environmental regulations, and motivations are glossed over, to instead emphasize that the schools of salmon hold economic value. This commodification is also evident in several mining focused series wherein they must remove the

overburden, feet of dirt that is deemed 'worthless', before hitting pay dirt beneath it. On *Bering Sea Gold* the narrator says "the Bering Sea opens for business" literally equating the Bering sea to a store (Bering Sea Gold, 2x03, 7:27) (Figure 3.9). Later in the same episode a character describes the gold she is holding saying, "I'm holding about 400 bucks in my hand" again the gold is seen solely for its economic and financial value, devoid of any of its other properties (Bering Sea Gold, 2x03, 10:45).

Figure 3.9. Image of the Bering Sea seen on screen while the narrator describes the Bering Sea as a store (Bering Sea Gold, 2x03, 7:25

At the beginning of the third season of *American Loggers* the Pelletier Brothers logging company is working on a claim known as the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC). The Pelletiers hope that this claim will boost their business, but it is unusual for them because the AMC is a conservation group with environmental concerns. The AMC requires a speciality cut to preserve future trees, and are described as taking a kinder gentler approach to managing the forest (American Loggers, 3x01). This environmental concern creates tensions between the Pelletiers' desire to create the most profit and the AMC's interest in conservation. By the third episode of the season the Pelletiers have broken their contract with the AMC, choosing to log elsewhere to maximize their profits. This serves to further reinforce the notion that forestry should be done for

maximum profits, showing that lumber is a resource that is most valuable when cut and extracted.

While there is a pervasive representation of nature as a commodity, series that premiered in 2015 or 2016 have a tendency to offer an alternative understanding. National Geographic's *Mine Hunters,* and *Big Fish Texas,* and Discovery's *Pacific Warriors* tend to offer a more holistic view of nature and the environment. As the team on *Mine Hunters* works with small-scale mines they attempt to minimize the environmental impacts, counter to the final decision of the crew on *American Loggers.* The team seems to have more respect for nature as a system saying "nature is giving you emeralds, and we are giving back to nature by keeping it clean", as they work to ensure that tailings from the emerald mine to not make it into local water sources (Mine Hunters, 1x01, 26:50). They also take core samples from hard rock in another attempt to minimize their environmental impact, saying the technique is a "great way to go exploring without doing anything to the landscape" (Mine Hunters, 1x03, 15:20). While it is possible that the crews on the other mining shows meet some measure of environmental regulations (by choice or force), they receive little to no focus while a nearly endless stream of Birdseye images of completely denuded areas are featured (Figure 3.10).

Figure 3.10. Gold mining site in Ghana, note the excavator in the top left for size reference (Jungle Gold, 2x01, 18:52).

On *Big Fish Texas* Buddy has a similar interest in environmental responsibility in the Gulf of Mexico. Buddy is one of the people behind the Gulf Wild Tag, a certification that focuses on traceability and sustainability. This is a labeling and tagging system that was created by commercial fishers in which they are putting more restrictions on themselves than the federal government (Big Fish Texas, 1x01, 5:20). However, this interest still seems to be strongly rooted in the economic value of a resource, and its sustainability for continued economic success. Buddy discusses how it is important for him to be a good steward to the fish, which is largely influenced by his hope that if they manage the it correctly the red snapper fishery could be the best in the world (Big Fish Texas, 1x01, 2:10).

Discovery's *Pacific Warriors* shows one of the only more holistic approaches to fishing. In addition to the two groups of commercial kayak fishers, the show also follows a subsistence fisher, and a trophy fisher, who is out to catch a record setting marlin. Set in Hawaii, *Pacific Warriors* focuses on the revival of the ancient tradition of fishing from canoes or kayaks (Pacific Warriors, 1x01, 1:00). The series features conversations about different fish species and their ecology, and the function of different ocean waves and currents. In one episode Kimi discusses how she is hunting roi because they are an invasive species, and how she is "doing the ocean a favour" because of everything it does for her (Pacific Warriors, 1x03, 18:35).

This study has found that themes of masculinities and a feminine nature become important to the way the genre of resource based reality television tells stories about the primary sector and the people who work in it. Across different series there is a tendency to focus on masculine tropes, such as 'from a boy to man', or 'masculinity as bravery'. These tropes are used to construct masculine identities that are in part defined against female crewmembers, and furthered by the subjugation of a feminized nature. This study found that as nature was

feminized, it also became sexualized and commoditized; it was valued only for economic worth rather than being viewed as something with inherent value. By devaluing nature through these two avenues this genre produces relationships in which masculine control is more easily exerted. This understanding of nature informs human-environment relations in which humans, men specifically, exist apart from and dominate nature.

3.2. Nationalism

This section will explore the theme of nationalism and how patriotism and national pride become integral to telling stories about resource extractive environments. First, this section will explore the way that national pride becomes central to the identities of the crews working in resource extractive environments through the repetition of nationalistic sayings and symbols. Second, this section will consider how a specific vision of the 'American Dream' is utilized to convey the importance of achieving success through hard work and determination. Third, this section will discuss US/them tensions that are both a product of and further entrenched by messages of American nationalism. This genre repeats messages central to American myth-making to normalize resource extraction and environmental degradation as these American crews are depicted as having a right to nature across the globe.

3.2.1. National Pride

Through the boasts of crewmembers and different visual queues 11 series in this genre convey the theme of nationalism and reinforce the importance of a strong sense of national pride. On a retrospective episode of *Gold Rush* one crewmember discusses the mentality of the group of American miners when they set off to mine in Guyana. Despite being unfamiliar with the terrain, the culture, and mining practices of Guyana, and never having mined in a jungle, they left thinking, "We are Americans, we can do anything" (Gold Rush, 4x20, 22:22). There is a

similar bravado present in *Swords: Life on the Line* when the American crew is discussing the recovery of the swordfish population. The crew states that catching a triple marker[18] is evidence that the swordfish population is in recovery because it was able to grow so large. Although vessels from many different countries are involved in the swordfisheries, the crew attributes the recovery to US regulations on hooks. The US fisheries are required to use a circle hook, which only hooks on the lip of the fish, this ensures there is no internal damage and small fish can be released so they are able to grow and populate (Swords: Life on the Line, 2x01, 35:30). There is also a sense of pride in American industry, as Greg holds up the hose for a pump on *Gold Rush* while proudly declaring "Made in the USA" (Gold Rush, 2x02, 20:50). Additionally different visual symbols and signs display a sense of national pride on these shows. For example, the importance of American industry is also emphasized on *Swords: Life on the Line* through a sticker that reads "buy US swordfish", as shown in Figure 3.11**.**

Figure 3.11. Sticker with an American Flag reading 'BUY U.S. SWORDFISH' displayed above the name of the fishing vessel (Swords: Life on the Line, 2x08 11:19)

[18] With swordfish, if it weights at least 100 pounds it is considered a marker. For every extra 100 pounds it gains another marker (e.g., 200 pounds is a double marker, 300 pounds is a triple marker, etc.).

The theme of nationalism and national pride can be conveyed through speech, e.g. “God bless America…” (Deadliest Catch, 12x06, 33:09), but importantly it is also enforced through the repetition of visual iconography. This includes patriotic symbols such as bald eagles, and the American flag, which are used to ensure that it is clear that these crews are Americans. The first season of *Alaska: Battle on the Bay* features an episode that takes place on the Fourth of July, complete with fireworks and full outfits with the pattern of the American Flag (Alaska: Battle on the Bay, 1x06). Some of the visuals are less pronounced and do make sense within the particular scene. For example, on *Deadliest Catch* you may see an American flag flying on a certain boat, this is used to display that it is an American vessel to other boats. Slightly more prominently symbols will be cut into the middle of scenes, or used as transitions, even if their presence seems somewhat out of place. For example, you will see multiple images of bald eagles, even on series like *Deadliest Catch,* which primarily take place in the middle of the ocean. Another example would be a lingering focus on American Flags, on series where the mining is taking place internationally. There are also instances where the symbols are more pronounced, for example when a transparent flag overlays a scene on *Swords: Life on the Line.* Figure 3.12 shows an example of a number of different ways that patriotic symbols are seen across different series.

Figure 3.12. Display of a spectrum of patriotic symbols from more subtle on the left to less subtle on the right (*Top row*: Bering Sea Gold, 2x10, 0:52; Deadliest Catch, 12x10. 2:12; Swords: Life on the Line, 2x01, 0:25; *Bottom Row*: Deadliest Catch, 12x01, 0:03; Gold Rush, 2x14, 43:09; Siberian Cut, 1x01, 1:48)

As seen in Figure 3.12 patriotic images appear frequently on series associated with each of the three different resources (fishing, mining, and logging) that were sampled. The repetition of symbols is consistent across the different resources based shows in both frequency and style. Series will feature long lingering shots of American flags blowing in the wind, or of Bald Eagles sitting in the focus of the frame (according to the rule of thirds the eagle in Figure 3.12 sits in a focal point of the image, drawing your eye to it and making it more visually appealing). Figure 3.13 shows two images in which nearly identical patriotic symbols adorn welders' helmets. While these images are incredibly similar the image on the left is from *Gold Rush,* a series focused on mining, and the image on the right is from *American Loggers*, a series focused on logging. While the appearance of symbols across resources is consistent, they are much more commonly featured on Discovery Channel series than they are on the sample of National Geographic series.

Figure 3.13. Men wearing patriotically adorned welding helmets on *Gold Rush* (Left) and *American Loggers* (Right) (Gold Rush, 2x12, 30:00; American Loggers, 3x01, 40:12)

3.2.2. The American Dream

This genre frequently utilizes the myth making behind the notion of the American Dream to convey the importance of national pride, and hard work. This idea is present on both networks as the different series feature people striving to achieve success through hard work and determination. The American Dream is referred to the most explicitly on series focused on mining, this may be due to the connection of mining to the gold rush, and that specific era of American myth making. In the mining series a particular vision of the American Dream is presented, and this vision is elevated above that of different conceptions of the American Dream. On *Gold Rush* when referring to gold mining one character says, "Some people think the American Dream is a two-story house with a white picket fence, two new cars out in the driveway, and, uh, I'd give that up any day of the week. This is the American Dream, this is what it is" (Gold Rush, 2x07, 19:07) (Figure 3.14).

Figure 3.14. Image shown on screen as a miner says "This is the American Dream, this is what it is" (Gold Rush, 2x07, 19:22)

The concept of the American Dream is also used to encourage the audience to cheer for different teams of people. The introduction to the first season of *Ice Cold Gold* set the scene with eight American miners heading to Greenland, putting everything on the line to achieve the "American Dream" (Ice Cold Gold, 1x01, 1:20). Similarly, in the fourth season of *Gold Rush,* Todd and his crew travel to Guyana with the hope that they will be able to find large amounts of gold that they couldn't even dream of find in the Klondike (Gold Rush, 4x01, 3:30). It seems that it is not important for the American Dream to take place in America. Rather it becomes apparent, that the important aspect of the American Dream is that the dreamers are American. Even when focusing on non-American crews, mining is still presented as a dream. Big Al, a Canadian gold miner on *Yukon Gold* describes himself by saying, "I'm just an average guy chasing a dream" (Yukon Gold, 1x01, 1:48). However, because the crews are not American the dream, and the act of gold mining itself, instead becomes associated with Heaven. Following a successful season in which he has found more than one million dollars worth of gold Big Al says of gold mining, "you're pretty close to heaven as far as I'm concerned" (Yukon Gold, 1x10, 43:29). Similarly, on Discovery's *Jungle Gold* a British man has leased land in Ghana to the

series' lead characters. When he is discussing his interest in gold mining he says, "the way the bible describes it is that the road of heaven is paved with gold" (Jungle Gold, 2x06, 2:45). This creates some thematic connects between the American Dream and Heaven, the idea that the American dream is a holy mission also plays on American myth making, and the legacy of manifest destiny.

3.2.3. US vs. Them

Setting America in opposition to other nations also reinforces the importance of national pride. Series where crews of Americans travel around the world not only set up nature as the main advisory, but specifically the nature of that region. In *Ice Cold Gold* the crew is battling the landscape of Greenland which is often personified as previously discussed, and in *Siberian Cut* a crew of Russian and American men must work together and the series emphasizes that national pride is at stake (Siberian Cut, 1x01). Building these tensions results in an us (or US) vs. them dichotomy, that is used to increase the drama and entertainment of the various series. This dichotomy also tends to be hierarchical, as the US is elevated above the other. *Siberian Cut* for example relies heavily on a revival of Cold War tensions, as the show begins the narrator sets up the premise of the show cautioning, "if age old enemies can't work together, a new cold war could break out deep in the Siberian forest" (Siberian Cut, 1x01, 1:08). The specific place that this logging is occurring becomes incredibly important as *Siberian Cut* trades on the cold war narrative of 'national triumphalism'.

In addition to the use of popular narratives us/them tensions are also created through different editing techniques to juxtapose the energy of two different places. The majority of *Jungle Gold* focuses on two Americans gold mining in Ghana, however the show begins in Utah as one of the leads attempts to get a loan from his father in-law to finance the teams return to

Ghana. Figure 3.15 features two images from the series' first episode, the image on the left is in Utah, and the image on the right is in Ghana. The portion of the series in Utah features long shots as the camera pans around the calm and open landscape. Barely visible in the bottom of the frame is the tip of a rifle, as the two men were skeet shooting moments before their conversation. Despite the appearance of a firearm, the long shots, colouring, and music all contribute to a tranquil and relaxed energy. When the crew arrives in Accra, Ghana, the editing changes. These scenes feature quick cuts of a busy street with bright colours that make you feel uneasy, and on edge. The image on the right of Figure 3.15 shows a still from a video of people taken through some vegetation, their faces are blurred and the sense of danger and intrigue increases as there is a sense that you are not suppose to be there. This is one example of how deliberate camera work and editing furthers the tensions needed for an us/them dichotomy.

Figure 3.15. An image of Utah from *Jungle Gold* (left), and an image of Ghana from *Jungle Gold* (right) (Jungle Gold, 2x01, 8:30; 19:02)

Similarly to how series on Discovery utilize the repetition of patriotic symbols more frequently than series on National Geographic, the same pattern appears with the theme of an us/them dichotomy. National Geographic's *Mine Hunters* is a notable example of a show that attempts to portray a more cooperative model of mining in different communities. The specialized team of four men from different western countries (two are American) partners with

local people and small scale mining operations in order to find rare gems. Each episode features information on the specific gem they are searching for, such as how it was formed, and the history of the region. The team stays with an Inuit community in Greenland, where one local man jokes that he "never expected to have Americans on his side" (Mine Hunters, 1x03, 22:00). They also afford more screen time to local people, and attempt to follow local customs, as they ask for permission to mine from a local chief in Zambia (Mine Hunters, 1x06, 3:41). However, there is still a level in which they seem to view themselves as different from the people they are working with. In the eighth episode of the season they are explicitly told they cannot enter or leave the specific mining area between certain hours[19]. The team stays too late and attempts to leave and are shocked when they discover that they cannot, at the threat of armed guards. It seems that their shock and anger at not being allowed to exit the area is rooted in fact that they are not allowed special privileges in the area they are visiting (Mine Hunters, 1x08). While Mine Hunters attempts to build a model of cooperation rather than competition it does not entirely escape an us/them mentality.

This study revealed how the prevalence of a distinctly American nationalism is central to the stories in the resource based reality television genre. The theme of nationalism is conveyed through praise and boasts from different crewmembers, as they proudly declare themselves Americans. The sense of national pride is also re-enforced through the repetition of visual iconography. The camera focuses on American nationalist symbols such as bald eagles and the American flag, which serve as a constant reminder that these crews are American. Building on gold rush narratives of people striving to achieve success through hard work and determination,

[19] The mining area in Zambia is in a military protected zone with armed check-points that prevent emerald smuggling out of the area. These areas have restricted hours of access, you are only able to enter and leave before 6 pm.

these series convey that it is not important for the American Dream to take place in America. Rather it seems that it is simply important that the dreamers are American to express a sense of national triumphalism. Similarly to the theme of masculinity, the normalization of nationalism also relies on the ability of hard working Americans to overcome and dominant nature all around the world. This reinforces narratives that create a separation between humans and the environment, as nature remains something to be exploited.

3.3. The Frontier

The following section explores how the idea of the frontier becomes integral to the way the resource based reality television genre produces imaginaries about nature and the people who are able to conquer it. First this section will consider the prevalence of the notion of the frontier, and its location at the edge of civilization, and how the notion of us/them extends into the imaginaries of the frontier. Finally this section considers how the frontier is produced as an imaginary that could be anywhere, and thus nowhere simultaneously, which serves to distance the viewer from these productions from nature that exist far from their everyday lives.

As discussed in the literature review, the idea of the frontier, which weaves together themes of nationalism and masculinity, has prominently been produced in media through the Western genre. Westerns have been used to explore questions of national identity, and frontier narratives, through the cycle of repetition and revision of national mythologies (Edgerton and Marsden, 2011). In the introduction to *Ice Cold Gold,* the narrator says, "eight Americans going to the Arctic Circle, a place most men would run from" (Ice Cold Gold, 1x01, 3:56). This quote demonstrates how the intersection of the miners' identities as American men, not simply men, elevates them allowing them to accomplish things others could not. As Greenland is equated with the notion of the new frontier, similar to the Old West in America, the series conveys

another triumph of American spirit against a hostile wilderness. Imaginaries of cowboys and Westerns are also invoked through visual queues, such as cowboy hats, and the music that is utilized. For example, *Deadliest Catch's* theme song "Wanted Dead or Alive" by Bon Jovi quickly establishes a romanticized connection to the notion of the cowboy with lines such as "I'm a cowboy, on a steel horse I ride" played over images of men battling fierce storms.

Several series present the place in which their industry takes places as the final frontier, as the last untouched place on Earth. The first season of *Deadliest Catch* quickly establishes this idea as the narrator says, "The last frontier, Dutch Harbour Alaska" (Deadliest Catch, 1x01, 2:46). Similarly, *Siberian Cut* presents the Siberian forest in Russia as the final frontier (Siberian Cut, 1x03, 1:10). It seems illogical that both of these places can simultaneously be the final frontier. Even when the frontier is not referred to explicitly, there is still an emphasis on doing something that has never been done before. Guy the team leader, and benefactor on Mine Hunters says, "for a group of western miners going to Colombia, it's blazing a trail" (Mine Hunters, 1x01, 43:53).

There is a prevalent idea that places this resource extraction is occurring are a remote new world. This is consistent across the three different resources. This is true for both areas within the United States, and for international areas. On Discovery's *American Loggers*, Andrew Pelletier describes the forests of Northern Maine where they log by saying, "When you leave and start going north, you're in another world" (American Loggers, 3x06, 31:13). On *Gold Rush* Dave confronts Todd about his decision to mine in Guyana, saying, "You brought us to the ends of the earth!" (Gold Rush, 4x01, 1:23:00). The majority of mining focused resource based series feature resource extraction in a country other than the United States. Prominent examples include Canada, Ghana, Guyana, Greenland, Zambia, and Colombia. It is likely not an accident that the

most invasive and visibly environmentally destructive industries (mining, and logging) happen outside of the United States.

3.3.1. US/Them in the Frontier

As previously discussed, series airing on Discovery more commonly produce an us/them dichotomy that builds on nationalism than National Geographic series. This is also particularly important to the way in which the frontier is represented. Similar to the Western genre, Discovery series empty the frontier, showing it devoid of people with limitless vistas that serve to 'naturalize' the process of American expansion. This can be seen in Discovery's *Ice Cold Gold*, where a crew of 8 Americans spends two months in Greenland hoping to find gold in the newly thawed landscape, which has been revealed as a consequence of climate change (though no other environmental, social, or political dimensions of climate change are addressed). The crew begins in Nuuk, the capital of Greenland, but after their initial arrival where they gather supplies for their stay no more locals are seen in the episodes that were sampled. This is a particular framing of the area that makes it appear as if it is an open area that is waiting for an American triumph over hostile landscape.

In the first season finale of *Ice Cold Gold*, rather than gold the crew manages to find rubies on the island Fiskenæsset[20]. While this area seems devoid of people on *Ice Cold Gold,* the same area is featured in an episode of the first season of National Geographic's *Mine Hunters*. In the third episode of *Mine Hunters, Blood Red Rubies,* a 'specialist team' of four men (two Americans, a Brit, and an Australian) employed by Guy Clutterbug, a British gem hunter travel to Fiskenæsset, Greenland. There, the team partners with a small scale mining operation in

[20] Qeqertarsuatsiaat is the local name, neither show *Ice Cold Gold,* nor *Mine Hunters* refer to it as such.

attempt to find the rare Blood Red Rubies. The team offers their 'western know-how', which is paired with local knowledge to find gems, in exchange for first right to refusal of any Blood Red Rubies that are found at the mine site. In the introduction to the episode Guy Clutterbug still poses the idea that "[Greenland] could be the new frontier of the gem world" (Mine Hunters, 1x03, 2:00). *Mine Hunters* in comparison to *Ice Cold Gold* focuses in part on the desire of the local people to develop a mining industry, including the cutting of gems, to keep as much of the value of these newly 'revealed' rubies in the country[21]. It should be noted that while the men in *Mine Hunters* are not all American, it is still four white men from Western countries bringing colonialist ideas.

3.3.2. Anywhere/Nowhere, the Frontier as an Idea

Another prominent theme is the establishment that the frontier could both be anywhere and nowhere simultaneously. This imaginary is enforced primarily through a series of visual imagery. Each of the 15 different series frequently employ sweeping images of the landscape that they are based in. These images tend to fill spaces preceding or following a commercial break, or a change in the featured storyline. Some of these images are of the towns that these workers are based out of (e.g., Nome, Alaska in *Bering Sea Gold*, or Dutch Harbor in *Deadliest Catch*). However, there is also a proliferation of what could easily be stock images of landscapes, with long panoramic shot of blue skies, open waters, and forested mountainous areas (Figure 3.16). These filler images differ slightly when they are used to introduce a new story, when the image may be accompanied by a narrator's identification of the area, or a label in the lower third of the screen. The inhabited areas are often labeled with a more specific place than the more stock images of different limitless landscapes, especially if they are not located within the US

[21] It is suggested that in developing a successful mining industry Greenland may be able to secede from Denmark.

(Figure 3.17).

Figure 3.16. Two images of landscape from *Gold Rush* that are featured between scenes. (Gold Rush 4x10, 2:18; 11:32)

This can create an imaginary wherein these spaces could be both nowhere and anywhere at the same time. This drawing of a line between the known areas of American civilization and the unknown wild nature is comparable to the way in which the Western genre changed the idea of the 'frontier' from the European definition of a fixed political and geographical boundary, evolving to refer to the "imaginary line between American civilization and nature, or the

Figure 3.17. Image from *Gold Rush* of Guyana labeled in the lower third (left). Image from *Deadliest Catch* with Dutch Harbor labeled in lower third (right) (Gold Rush, 4x10, 2:05; Deadliest Catch, 8x01, 2:47)

uncreated future" (Tibbetts, 2011, p. 46).

Different from the nowhere and anywhere paradigm present in Westerns is a focus on maps and the distances between different boats, mine sites, or logging locations. The inclusion of

maps could theoretically create tensions between these landscapes as nowhere and anywhere, as they provide these imaginaries with known places on the earth. However, many of the maps that are shown lack features that would help orient the viewer with the locations of the different teams (Figure 3.18). Rather than establishing the bearings of the viewer these maps often serve to emphasize how great the distances between the crews are, from both each other and areas the viewer may be more familiar with. For example, the narrator in the beginning of Siberian Cut says, "5 thousand miles from the United States is Russia" which serves to enforce to the audience that what is happening in the series is happening far in the distance (Siberian Cut, 1x01, 1:52). By emphasizing the distance between the port and the different boats, series such as *Deadliest Catch* serve to emphasize that these places are far away from any sort of 'civilization' further entrenching the dichotomy of man/nature and urban/rural. This serves to further distance the viewer from these places, possibly increasing the feeling of the unknown.

Figure 3.18. Maps featured on *Deadliest Catch* (left) and *Wicked Tuna* (right) (Deadliest Catch, 12x16, 4x08; Wicked Tuna 3x05, 3:55)

This study showed that the different themes on natural resource based reality series do not operate in isolation from one another. The frontier exemplified a unique intersection between masculinities and nationalism. The different series convey another triumph of American spirit

against a hostile wilderness building on American mythmaking of the frontier and the masculine Old West. These series construct an image of primary resources sector activities occurring in a remote new world, the final frontier. By using shots of limitless vistas, often devoid of people, these series 'naturalize' the process of American expansion. These series draw a line between known areas of American civilization and the unknown wilderness while establishing that the imaginary frontier is both anywhere and nowhere simultaneously. This serves to further distance the viewer from these places, possibly increasing the feeling of the unknown. Emphasizing that these places exist far away from any sort of 'civilization' further entrenches a human/nature dichotomy and separation of humans and the environment

3.4. Conclusion

This analysis has demonstrated that there are a number of complex ways in which themes of masculinities and nationalism intersect on natural resource based reality television series. Hyper masculine identities were in part defined based on the subjugation of a feminized nature. This production of nature was both sexualized and presented as a commodity or a thing rather than as a holistic system with inherent value. The repetition of patriotic symbols conveyed a sense of national pride, which then relied on American mythmaking, such as the American dream, or the frontier to exert control and ownership over nature around the world producing distinctive human-environment relationships. Finally, the frontier represented a unique intersection between masculinities and nationalism that serves to distance the viewer from the images they are shown, often sensationalizing them. The implications of these findings will be further examined in the following chapter.

Chapter 4. Discussion: Limitations, Future Research, and Contributions

The presentation of nature on television has the potential to (re)produce and entrench particular human visions of the environment and understandings of appropriate human relationships with it (Horak, 2006). The aim of this research is to examine natural resource based reality television series as a new iteration in the (re)production of nature on television, and to critically analyze how this genre mediates human-environment relations. The analysis shows that resource based reality series blend elements of two genres: wildlife films and reality television. The genre seeks to entertain by telling 'real life' stories of people who participate in primary resource sectors. Looking across multiple series has revealed that the human-environment relations typical to the genre are hyper-masculine, nationalist, and, in ways strikingly similar to Westerns of the past, romanticize American frontierism. This study also highlights that these different themes on natural resource based reality series do not operate in isolation from one another, but intersect to reinforce themes of human control over nature.

Brockington (2009) says that the "demand for wildlife film is both a product of our alienation from nature, and one of the forces that produces and enhances that alienation" (p. 57). The mediations of nature through the television serve to connect urban areas and the homes of the audience to a rural remote frontier that they have been alienated from. The demand for natural resource based series could be a product of the audience's separation from the mythological American dream, the frontier, and this type of masculinity. Horak (2006) asks the question of wildlife documentaries, "Is the growing obsession to document visually the animal world at least partially a desperate act 'to save' wildlife for a virtual world?" (p. 460). In a time of crumbling masculinity, this study suggests that the documentation of resource based reality

series, and their depictions of masculine nationalism, is an effort to save a virtual image of the imaginary frontier, and all of the American mythology that inspires it.

Previous depictions of nature on television "invoke ideals of nature and wilderness which depend on the absence of people" (Brockington, 2009, p. 45). The predominantly male hosts of these programs were some of the few humans privileged enough to enter these spaces for finite amounts of time (Chris, 2006; Brockington, 2009). Resource based reality television expands on this notion that masculinity is an important requirement to traverse an otherwise empty nature in primary sector environments. The people working in the primary sector in this genre are not just men, but it is important that they embody hyper masculine traits as they become integral to their continued presence in the remote, unpredictable wilderness. The toughness and bravery that is required to do their jobs is explicitly connected to traits of hegemonic masculine, recall on Discovery's *Gold Rush* when one character is describing what is required for someone to be a successful gold miner he says, "you've got to have a pair of balls you know" (Gold Rush, 2x19, 16:05).

Furthermore, resource based reality series convey the sense that the masculine identities of primary sector workers are mutually constituted by the wild and unknown landscapes that they work in. It is not only important that workers be masculine to extract resources, but these environments become central to the growth of a boy into manhood. On *Gold Rush* Tony says of Parker "either he's going to stay a boy or be a man in the Yukon" (Gold Rush, 4x16, 41:02). This suggests that it is the act of surviving and conquering nature in the Yukon that is integral to the formation of his identity as a man. This serves to further reinforce that these spaces of primary sector activity are only places for adult men who are able to exhibit the characteristics of strength and bravery that become integral to notions of hegemonic masculinity. Recall on National

Geographic's *Big Fish Texas* how a veteran captain says "there are no kids out on the Gulf of Mexico. If you're on the deck, you're a man. You have man responsibilities" (Big Fish Texas, 1x08, 15:37).

The importance of masculinity to the 'mastery' over wildlife is not fully explored in previous analyses of wildlife films. This theme is more explicit in analyses of reality television series, such as *Survivor*, which consider ways in which the normalcy of gendered roles and masculine control over nature are reinforced (Waggoner, 2004). Broader reality television reinforces accepted gendered stereotypes, and the limited research on *Deadliest Catch* and *Gold Rush* suggests that these series are produced as a way push back against the broadening of gendered identities and a (perceived) loss of masculine control (Buchanan, 2014; Trapani and Winn, 2014). These series rely on romanticized images of westerns and American triumphalism to reaffirm control. By considering nature based reality television as a genre it allows us to see that the characters in these series are a new age of cowboys (Buchanan, 2014). Recall, for example, how the narrator of *Ice Cold Gold* says, "eight Americans going to the Arctic Circle, a place most men would run from" (Ice Cold Gold, 1x01, 3:56). This highlights how the intersection of the miners' identity as American men is integral to the way that their masculinity is depicted. In another example *Deadliest Catch's* theme song "Wanted Dead or Alive" connections the mythology of the American cowboy with the crews featured on the series, and that connection is repeated and reinforced in each episode. This synthesis of masculine nationalism, and the national mythology of the frontier and frontiersmanship becomes integral to how this genre mediates nature and the primary sector. The genre uses tropes associated with these three themes convey the triumph of the masculine American spirit against a hostile wilderness, which serves to naturalize the process of expansion and resource extraction.

In previous research on the Western genre, and on *Gold Rush* the isolated environments and the limitless vista of the frontier serve as a passive backdrop that has been emptied so that men can reclaim their masculine control in a space that is separate from the domestic sphere (Edgerton and Marsden, 2011; Trapani and Winn, 2014). This production of nature as a passive background is challenged within the genre of resource based reality series, including on the series *Deadliest Catch* and *Gold Rush*. The production of nature that is presented in this genre is that of an active character in these stories, with the capacity to push back against the American men that attempt to conquer and own it. This is highlighted in different series with quotes such as "Mother nature steps in and takes things away from us" (American Loggers, 3x08, 5:00), "if you've got a weak spot, the Bering Sea will find it" (Deadliest Catch, 8x03, 0:20). The genre describes nature as a force that is purposefully working against the primary sector workers creating a barrier that must be overcome in order for them to successfully strike it rich and regain masculine control. The crews are able to reclaim the masculine identities that the viewers of these series may perceive as lost to them.

Natural resource based reality series also depart from previous productions of nature in wildlife films, reality television, and Westerns by depicting nature as feminine. Recall on *Ice Cold Gold* how one character states, "Greenland is like a woman, incredibly beautiful but at the same time there is the potential for sheer terror" (Ice Cold Gold, 1x01, 39:50). This feminization of nature reinforces a gendered dichotomy in which masculine control is defined against feminine subjugation. This genre tells stories in which men can prove their masculinity by gaining control over and profiting from a powerful feminine nature. Additionally, triumphing over a hostile wilderness rather than a passive one characterizes successful resource extraction as a well deserved bounty earned through competition, rather than exploitative or destructive. It is

possible that as nature is also devalued to make the process of control over a fierce opponent easier. This creates tensions in this genre as nature is produced as both active to create excitement, and an object that is devalued through sexualization or commodification so it can be exploited. This genre enables the reclamation of masculinity and national identity by dominating and devaluing nature. Broadly this devaluing of a feminine nature is achieved in this genre through one of two avenues: the sexualization of nature or the commodification of nature.

Departing from messages in the Western, natural resource based series devalue nature in order to exert control, one way this is done is through the sexualization of a feminized nature. Some of the sexualization in this genre is portrayed through humour, remember on *American Loggers* how the narrator says, "nothing comes between Chad and his wood" (American Loggers, 3x08, 3:50). With this use of comedy it does not matter "whether the penis is praised, damned, or laughed at, the effect is to reiterate its cultural importance" (Lloyd, 2014, p. 98). According to Buchanan (2015) one of the five primary features of hegemonic masculinity in American culture is heterosexuality, which can likely be extending to heteronormativity. Within a heteronormative understanding, emphasizing the cultural importance of the penis translates to emphasizing the importance of masculinity. The sexualization of nature through language such as "virgin ground," "stripping", "gold bearing soil", and "plunge hole" allows for the reclamation of the perceived loss of control that triggered the 'crisis in masculinity'.

As Nature is produced as an active and potentially violent character it is feminized to objectify it, making it more easily tamed. Using accepted industry terms that double as sexual slang is one way that this genre reproduces masculine control over nature. By drawing parallels between nature and sexualized objects or body parts the cultural relevance associated with those objects is extended to characterize nature. For example, according to Bapst (2001) the attractive

factor of a glory hole is the "thrill of the unknown" and for some "inserting their penises into glory holes gave a feeling of masculine power" (Bapst, 2001, p. 101). In *Gold Rush* the use of the term 'glory hole' is also frequently accompanied by the hope that it is holding a fortune's worth of gold just below the surface. Part of what makes the mining of the glory hole so appealing is the risk and the thrill of not knowing how much gold it may hold. Parallels can be drawn as over the course of *Gold Rush* in becomes increasingly dangerous to mine the glory hole as the sides threaten to collapse in on the crew. The crew gambles willing to take the risk for the possibility of hitting it rich, and when a male member of the crews wishes to stop and mine elsewhere an argument ensues in which the crew leader he seeks to emasculate him saying, "I don't know what Dustin's problem is today, mad as a woman" (Gold Rush, 2x14, 14:24). Not engaging with the glory hole and attempting to conquer it calls his masculinity into question.

The second way in which nature is devalued and reduced to an object in order to more easily exert control is by commoditizing it and addressing only its economic value. Across the different resources in this genre, nature is commonly produced as a commodity and a thing that humans have sense of ownership over, rather than viewing nature in a more holistic way. This commodification is also evident in several mining focused series where they must remove the overburden, feet of dirt that is deemed 'worthless', before hitting pay dirt beneath it. On *Bering Sea Gold* the narrator says "the Bering Sea opens for business" equating the Bering sea to a store (Bering Sea Gold, 2x03, 7:27). In creating this separation from human and the non-human, people lose "the ability to empathize and see the non-human sphere in ethical terms" (Plumwood 2002, 9 quoted in Weir 2009, 3). This vision of human-environment relationships is saved in this virtual format entrenching a human/nonhuman binary wherein humans are not a part of nature but are able to own and control it. By blending genres different tropes are made integral to telling

'real' stories about primary resource sectors and the people who work in them, and the illusion of ownership over nature is reinforced.

As discussed in Chapter 3 there are some alternatives to the commodification and control of nature that visible in the genre. *Pacific Warriors* presented the most prominent example of an alternate economy as a counter to the commodification and control of nature. *Pacific Warriors* was included in this analysis because it featured at least one storyline based on commercial fishing, but many of the different themes that arose came from another story line on the series. One storyline focused on subsistence spear fisher Kimi, who hunted only what she needed to eat. Kimi's storyline presents a more holistic view of nature rooted in an understanding that humans and the environment are interconnected. For example, she discusses how she hunts roi, an inedible invasive species, she hunts them to protect the ecosystem and to give something back to the ocean that gives so much to her (Pacific Warriors, 1x03, 18:35). It is possible that because Kimi is a woman and the sole character in her storyline (she does not need to act a certain way to prove the legitimacy of her presence to others), the more prominent themes of masculine control do not align with the series' representation of her experiences. Series that commodify nature such as *Bering Sea Gold, Gold Rush* and *Deadliest Catch* have run for many seasons (at the time of data collection 4, 6, 12 seasons respectively). While *Pacific Warriors* may present an alternative economy to these series it was cancelled after its first season. This suggests that series that deviate from the common themes and tropes fall away as they do not capture the interest of the audience.

In their analysis of *Deadliest Catch,* Kirby (2013) argues that resource based reality television series are redefining working-class masculinity. Rather than denigrating the working-class *Deadliest Catch* mythologizes them and elevates the heroic blue-collar jobs over less

dangerous white-collar jobs. This romanticisation of the primary sector over other jobs and masculinities is paralleled by the depiction of the American Dream. This genre depicts a narrative of the American Dream that is connected with conquering frontiers and the era of westward expansion, over other depictions of the American Dream such as the suburban fantasy of white picket fences. This is clear on *Gold Rush* when one character says, "some people think the American Dream is a two-story house with a white picket fence, two new cars out in the driveway, and, uh, I'd give that up any day of the week. This is the American Dream, this is what it is" (Gold Rush, 2x07, 19:07). Rather than being denigrated the workers and jobs in the primary sector are seen as aspirational, this is elevated even further on *Jungle Gold* when a character says, "the way the bible describes it is that the road of heaven is paved with gold" (Jungle Gold, 2x06, 2:45). Romanticizing the characters and the American Dream in this genre serves to legitimize and glorify resource extraction. The repetition of these messages serves to normalize resource extraction, environmental degradation, and western expansion as nature around the world seems to be in these American men's domain.

Resource based reality television also confirms and repeats narratives of American mythology is strikingly similar ways to the images presented in Westerns. Within the Western genre the frontier has come to be understood as an "imaginary line between American civilization and nature, or the uncreated future" (Tibbetts, 2011, p. 46). Recall how resource based reality television series present the various resource extractive landscapes as the final frontier. The idea that these various remote locations are the final frontier is established within the first few minutes of series like *Deadliest Catch* through phrases such as "Welcome to the last frontier, this is Dutch Harbour Alaska" (Deadliest Catch, 1x01, 2:46). These areas are presented as another world far removed from American civilization, existing as a wild and wonderful place

that the audience is only granted access to through their connection to the experiences of the characters on these series. Emphasizing that these places exist far away from any sort of 'civilization' further entrenches a human/nature dichotomy in which humans exist separate from nature and can transverse these spaces while not being a part of them. This spectacle distances the audiences, and these imaginary frontiers become the last safe place for these nationalist masculine identities, and they are preserved only in these virtual spaces.

Similarly to Westerns, resource based reality series also serve to further normalize western expansion and ownership over nature through the use of endless panoramas of empty landscapes. Think of the proliferation of what could easily be stock images of landscapes, with long panoramic shot of blue skies, open waters, and forested mountainous areas that appear across the genre. These areas tend to be familiar but do not offer any specific images or landmarks that allow the viewer to locate them. While the narration or a label on the lower third of the screen may describe the seen as Guyana, the accompanying images on the screen of a forested area are nearly indistinguishable from any other forest in a similar climate. Additionally, areas of US civilization are given much more local scales of identification such as Seattle, Washington, while areas in the frontier may be described as Guyana, South America. Giving vague descriptions of the frontier while using nondescript images of nature creates the imaginary that the frontier could be anywhere and nowhere at the same time, accessible only through these media representations.

4.1. Conclusion

This chapter has considered how natural resource based reality television series are the product the blending of wildlife films and reality television. This new genre seeks to connect the audience with a lifestyle and a landscape that they are unfamiliar with. These particular identities

and spaces are only accessible to the audience in these virtual spaces. Utilizing tropes about gender, nature as separate from the human sphere, and nationalism these series turn the identities of workers in the primary sector, and the spaces they exist in into a spectacle. This serves to reinforce the distance and separation of the viewer from nature, and these identities. This study has argued that the documentation of resource based reality series and their depictions of masculine nationalism is an effort to save a virtual image of the imaginary frontier, and all of the American mythology that inspires it.

In addition to reality television and wildlife films this genre has utilized tropes and imageries from American Westerns to produce an imagery of the frontier that exists anywhere and nowhere. Trapani and Winn (2014) say that we "understand today's man as hysterical because he is no longer able to invest effectively in the structures of power on which his own identity and power depends" (p. 186). These series normalize masculine control over a feminized nature, and the American narratives of control over the wilderness. The ideal hyper masculine identities that appear across this genre are only accessible within this virtual world, but the audience may invest in this masculinity virtually. As different tropes from the blending of genres are made integral to telling 'real' stories about primary resources sectors and the people who work in them nature remains in the domain of human, a resource to be exploited. As such the illusion of ownership over nature is reinforced.

4.2. Limitations of Study

As previously discussed, especially as a single researcher, discourse analysis cannot be argued to be the only, true analysis of the material (Rose, 2007). Rather as it is an interpretation rather than the only truth, and as such some materials are discussed at the expense of others. It is thus important to discuss the choices that were made in its construction, such as why some

materials were emphasized at the expense of others (Rose, 2007; Bauer & Gaskell, 2000a). Additionally, the positionality of the researcher impacts the interpretation, for example, I do not fall within the target demographic of these shows and am likely to have a different interpretation than another person who does. While discourse analysis enables an in-depth exploration of the material it does not allow the research to answer questions about why it has been assembled in a particular way, and does not allow for insight into the intentions of those involved in its production.

Furthermore as discussed in Chapter 2: Methods and Appendix A, focus groups were conducted to address the site of the audience as well as to confirm the validity of the themes that emerged in the discourse analysis of the natural resource based reality television genre. These focus groups were not representative of the intended audience of this genre. As only two focus groups were conducted they were addressed primarily in Appendix A rather than in the body of the thesis. The intended audience of these series is an American demographic; and while many Canadians also have access to these series, the Canadian based focus groups were not representative of that specific American audience. This is particularly true for themes such as the American Dream, and the way that the audience interprets the repetition of American mythmaking. The difference of understanding of social and culture differences between Canadian and American audiences is likely to extend to and impact the interpretation of themes of gender, nationalism, and the frontier as well.

4.3. Recommendations for Future Research

This research reveals several areas where future research should be directed. This research focused primarily on the site of the image itself through a systematic review of the natural resource based reality television genre. This research has acknowledged that what

appears the final product of this genre is impacted from different production and editing processes. As such further research could extend the findings of this research by interviewing those involved in the editing process. Engaging with directors and producers could allow for insight into why they assembled footage in this way, and could reveal insights into their intentions. Furthermore, these series have turned real people into characters. Speaking with the cast members of the different series about the themes of masculinities, nationalism, and the frontier that emerged in this study could provide further context to their actions as they appear on the series. Interviewing the people involved behind the camera as well as in front of it may reveal interesting tensions surrounding what was shown to be emphasized on these series through the discourse analysis in this study, and what was excluded and why.

Future research could further inform these findings by considering other promotional media associated with the genre. This could provide insight into what aspects of these series the different networks view as noteworthy, as well as which messages resonate with the audience. As discussed previously, alternate economies do appear in this genre but when series deviate from the standard themes of the genre they tend to fall away and are cancelled after only a couple of seasons. Engaging with other material that is distributed by the networks that produce these series could reveal patterns that help explain why these series are less successful than others. For example, perhaps new series are not wildly promoted, or they are promoted in different way that series such as *Deadliest Catch.*

This study analyzed a large sample of the series that were targeted at an American audience, and found that it relied heavily on specific imaginaries of American myth making. However, Discovery and National Geographic have multiple channels around the world with area specific programing. Further research into natural resource based reality series that air on

international Discovery and National Geographic channels could extend this analysis on how nature is (re)produced on television. Exploring area specific series could engage with how different audiences around the world influence the way that this genre mediates human-environment relations.

This research briefly explored the site of the audience with two exploratory focus groups. Future research might seek to understand how this genre is received and interpreted by other groups of people. The focus groups served to corroborate the themes that arose in the discourse analysis, including themes of masculinities, nationalism, and the frontiers. In the future research into this genre could focus greater attention on the role of the audience. Focus groups could be a valuable method to explore the site of the audience. In particular here are some suggestions: (1) Focus groups with other demographics; (2) Focus groups with groups of people with a range of familiarity and interest in this particular genre; (3) Focus groups with activities to interpret what the audience deems the most important aspects of this genre.

4.4. Contributions

The aim of this thesis was to examine natural resource based reality television series as a new iteration in the (re)production of nature on television, and to critically analyze how this genre mediates human-environment relations. This research has contributed to the broader research by seeking to identify and understand the themes that appear and are synthesized across the natural resource based reality television genre as a whole. This is particularly important as the audience of this largely popular genre receives a specific representation of resource based lifestyles as they are presented by a dominant culture. Identifying and understanding what messages are being mediated is the first step in understanding why certain stereotypes are by produced, by who and with what intentions, and what impact they have on the audience.

The first contribution of this research is the understanding that this genre highlights and emphasizes the importance of a specific type of masculinity. The hyper masculinity that appears on these series relies on a binary understanding of gender to define and produce the identities of different crewmembers. Building on a gendered binary the masculinity of the crewmembers is defined against a feminized nature. This genre reinforces the importance and control of hegemonic masculinity by telling stories in which men can prove their masculinity by gaining control over and profiting from a powerful feminine nature. However, as this feminine Nature is produced as an active and potentially violent character it is objectified by sexualizing and commodifying it, making it more easily tamed.

This genre also relies heavily on American mythmaking to mythologize these specific working class masculinities. The repetition of national imagery serves to normalize and reinforce American triumphalism. The repeated American mythmaking of the American dream, and frontiersmanship produce distinctive human-environment relationships. This genre presents a specific vision of the American Dream. Rather that producing a romanticized vision of suburban American with imagery of white picket fences, this genre reinforces gold rush, and old western narratives of men achieving success through hard work, determination, and a willingness to take a risk on unexplored territories. Narratives that rely on American mythmaking serve to further the separation between humans and the environment as understandings of a distant and final frontier normalize the process of American expansion.

Thirdly, by drawing an imaginary line between known areas of American civilization and the unknown wilderness this genre establishes that the imaginary frontier is both anywhere and nowhere simultaneously. Building on the different themes and formats that appear in other television genres that focus on nature this research argues that the documentation of resource

based reality series and their depictions of masculine nationalism is an effort to save a virtual image of the imaginary frontier, and all of the American mythology that inspires it. The ideal hyper masculine identities that appear across this genre are only accessible within this virtual world, but the audience may invest in this masculinity and the American Dream virtually.

Examining reality television is important and can provide us with new insights, the series that gain popularity are both reflective of society's dominant discourses, as well as a medium through which they are reinforced. Reality television also serves as a way for people to make connections with other places and identities (Bell-Jordan, 2008). As people are increasingly becoming removed from the jobs and environments featured in resource based reality television series, this genre has a greater power to influence the audience's understanding of these regions and the people that work in them. We need to be cautious and critical of what messages are being presented through this genre, and the potential implications that these representations have on the management of different environments. The American exceptionalism and gendered stereotypes presented in these series further entrenches the notion that humans are not a part of nature, and normalize a sense of ownership over nature across the globe that could be harmful for future environmental management and the sustainability of these resource extractive sectors.

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Appendix A: Reflection on the Focus Groups

As discussed in Chapter 2: Methods, the primary purpose of the exploratory focus groups was to determine the validity of the themes that emerged in the discourse analysis. While the participants of these focus groups were not representative of the target audience of the series in the natural resource based reality television genre they were still able to recognize similar themes that I found ensuring that the discourse analysis was more robust. I've only brought in the initial exploratory focus groups marginally to give the reader a sense of the how this genre does not exist in isolation, and to consider that the way that it is received at the site of the audience is important to understanding the phenomena as a whole. This section will provide a brief overview of the methods and findings from the focus groups, as well as a reflect on their strengths. Recommendations for the use of focus groups in future research on this topic can be found in Chapter 5: Conclusion of this thesis.

Data Collection

Building on the first phase of data collection, the second phase of data was collected through the execution of two focus groups. This phase of data collection addressed the site of the audience. While it is possible to infer how, why, and where audiences engage with visual imagery, focus groups allow for more nuanced insights into the audience's engagement with, and perceptions of different natural resource extraction based reality television series (Bartram, 2010). As with any television series, resource based reality television series are aimed at a target demographic. The target demographic of these natural resource based reality television series is males aged 25-54 (Chris, 2006). These focus groups were an exploratory effort to understand how the intended audience interprets the themes that are being depicted.

The inclusion criteria for the focus groups was males aged 25-54, this was in order to align with the target demographic of natural resource extraction based reality television series. Two focus groups were conducted with seven and four participants, and the majority of participants were under the age of 30. Participants were found through advertisements posted online, and were encouraged to bring people they knew to participate to allow them to be comfortable in the focus group setting (Valentine, 2005). Furthermore, having participants in focus groups with people they were previously familiar with increases their level of comfort with voicing their opinions led to a smaller variety in participants, the majority of participants were either current students or recent graduates.

The participants were shown two rounds of clips from various series that highlighted themes that arose in the discourses analysis, such as themes of masculinity and gender, and nationalism. Each round was comprised of short clips that were cumulatively under ten minutes long to maintain audience engagement, as advised by Batram (2010). Clips were included from six different series, in order to address the genre more broadly, rather than to focus on a specific series. The first round was comprised of clips from Discovery's *Deadliest Catch* and *Gold Rush.* The second round used clips from Discovery's *Ice Cold Gold* and *Alaska: Battle on the Bay,* and National Geographic's *Mine Hunters,* and *Big Fish Texas.*

Following each round of clips participants were encouraged to discuss their opinions of the clips with one another in the whole group. The groups were asked prompt questions to encourage participation. Some of the prompt questions asked after the first round of clips asked what characteristics the group would use to describe the people on these series, if they found them relatable or realistic, and if they noticed any stereotypes. The second round of clips compared two National Geographic series with two Discovery series. Some of the prompt

questions for the second round were aimed to establish if the audience felt that there were any differences in the style of series the two networks produced. The group was asked if they preferred one crew over another, or if they felt that one crew had a higher likelihood to succeed? They were also asked what they viewed as success on these series? Finally, the groups were asked based on the clips shown, if they would like to learn more about the different resource based jobs, or the people working in them?

Data Analysis

The focus groups were audio recorded, and transcribed in Microsoft word. The transcriptions from the focus groups were transferred into NVivo where they were coded into themes that were determined previously in the discourse analysis. Similar to the second round of coding in the discourse analysis this coding focused primarily on the themes of Ways Nature is represented, Gender, Nationalism, and Resource. In addition to these themes, the round of coding attempted to answer how participants felt about different aspects of the series they were shown. The participants different attitudes towards these themes were coded for, be they negative, positive, or more complicated in order to start to understand how the messages of this genre are received by the audience.

Findings

Masculinities

The general consensus of the focus groups aligned with the themes presented in Chapter 3 Findings of this thesis. For example, under the theme of Masculinities one participant spoke of a respect for the people who work in the extractive sector, he focused on the fact that their jobs are incredible dangerous, and expressed a longing for a more dangerous life and a return to

nature. The participant described how he had been in a university setting for the last 13 years and went on to say:

> There's an actual part of me sort of lusting to get out into the world and break shit, and cut myself a little bit, and you know, exactly what these shows are trying to sell as something that can be had. I don't know if its like an innate male thing, or whether its an innate historical thing, with the landscape for a hundred years, or a thousand years that we've been doing this stuff, but there's something kind of lacking there and I always feel better when I doing physical work, and breaking stuff (Participant 2, Focus Group 1).

One participant was surprised to see a woman was present in one of the clips from *Deadliest Catch,* though when it was mentioned that she was the daughter of Captain Sig, he felt that this explained her presence. He felt that her presence was the shows effort to offer some sort of twist, as he explained:

> like now we've got the girl, that's like struggling with the chip on her shoulder to prove herself not only to her dad but also, to the guys (Participant 1, Focus Group 1)

One theme that came up when asked about the presence on women in these resource extractive environments was that a woman would need to act in a similar way to the men to be able to keep up and be accepted:

> On the actual crew of working hard men it would be a tough environment for most females to live in unless she acted the same to fit in with that crew, at least in my experience (Participant 2, Focus Group Round 1).

Another prominent theme in the focus groups surrounding the theme of masculinity was the idea that these shows were pitting man against nature. When summing up his view of the multiple shows one participant said:

> Almost all of them seem like it is dangerous, like man verse nature, you could die at any moment, trip on a rock and you're dead (Participant 9, Focus Group Round 2).

A different participant questioned why people, including himself, were so interested in a "snapshot of this world" in which nature was sensationalized and dangerous. This particular participant stated.

> For the last 100 years we have been trying to evolve technologies and societies and getting rid of all that stuff, and now that we've you know, kind of sort of pacified nature and made everything convenient and we have sidewalks and roads everywhere, now there's this real lust and desire for us to get back in there, and whether or not its with ourselves, or we just watch people doing it, in a kind of voyeuristic- (Participant 2, Focus Group Round 1).

Nationalism

As previously mentioned, one of the main limitations of the focus groups was that the participants were Canadian rather than American. Though they may have a different cultural understanding of the nationalism that appeared they did still recognize its presence. After being shown clips from a selection of shows the different focus groups both commented on the repetition of patriotic symbols, with a particular focus on the images of bald eagles. One participant found the repetition of bald eagles, and their connection to patriotism humorous on Deadliest Catch, which resulted in the following exchange:

> **Participant 8:** Yeah, there were a lot of eagles as well, close ups of eagle eyes
> **Participant 10:** All that patriotism
> **Participant 8:** Eagles don't catch crab (Focus Group 2)

The group also understood the patriotism that was present on these shows as a specific type of patriotism unique to America. This was highlighted as one participant said, "there's no patriotic beaver shot" referring of course to Canada's national animal (Participant 9, Focus Group 2).

Strengths

Though semi structured interviews may allow for a deep conversation with participants about the way that they interact with this genre, I would argue that focus groups are a method

that would offer more robust results. One of the major strengths of focus groups to explore the site of the audience is the group setting as participants may be inspired by the comments of others in the focus groups. With a one to two hour focus group it is also possible to show clips or excerpts from different television series and to receive immediate feedback from the participants. This may not be possible in a one on one interview, and may not lead to a fruitful discussion on the themes. Additionally focus groups allow for a greater number of participants than interviews, and they can be formed to represent different demographic groups to explore how different identities impact the way the audience receives the messages mediated by the genre.

Appendix B: Sample of Episodes used in Discourse Analysis

5 or fewer seasons

Show	Season	Episode Number	Episode Title	Original Air Date	Running Time
Alaska: Battle on the Bay	1	1	Let the Battle Begin!	05-Jan-15	0:41:48
	1	3	Bristol Bay Jackpot!	22-Jan-15	0:41:49
	1	6	Fireworks	12-Feb-15	0:41:49
	1	8	Cashing In	19-Feb-15	0:41:49
American Loggers	3	1	Uphill Battle	04-Mar-11	0:43:34
	3	3	New Business, New Problems	18-Mar-11	0:43:34
	3	6	Rain Delay	08-Apr-11	0:43:33
	3	8	The Big Push	22-Apr-11	0:43:34
	3	10	Collision Course	08-May-11	0:43:34
Backyard Oil	1	1	Barons of the Backyard	23-Apr-13	0:21:19
	1	3	Kentucky Fried Chicken	30-Apr-13	0:21:18
	1	6	Science Comes to Town	14-May-13	0:21:19
	1	8	Game of Possum	28-May-13	0:21:18
	1	10	Milkshakin'	11-Jun-13	0:21:18
Bering Sea Gold	2	1	Point of No Return	04-Jan-13	0:43:34
	2	3	Nice Guys Finish Last	14-Jan-13	0:43:34
	2	6	No Snivelin	08-Feb-13	0:43:34
	2	8	Go Big or Go Home	01-Mar-13	0:43:34
	2	10	Gold Stress	15-Mar-13	0:43:34
	2	12	The American Dream	29-Mar-13	0:43:34
Big Fish Texas	1	1	King of the Gulf	03-Feb-16	0:44:18
	1	3	The Warsaw Pact	17-Feb-16	0:44:17
	1	6	All Fish and No Play	09-Mar-16	0:44:17
	1	8	Deckhand Down	23-Mar-16	0:44:17
Ice Cold Gold	1	1	David and Goliath	21-Apr-13	0:41:47
	1	3	Fractured	05-May-13	0:41:48
	1	6	Redemption Ridge	27-May-13	0:41:48
Jungle Gold	2	1	Deal With the Devil	11-Aug-13	0:42:35
	2	3	Run & Gun	25-Aug-13	0:42:36
	2	6	Run for the Border	08-Sep-13	1:25:38
Mine Hunters	1	1	Colombian Emeralds	19-Jan-16	0:44:17
	1	3	Blood Red Rubies	02-Feb-16	0:44:17

	1	6	African Aquamarine	23-Feb-16	0:44:16
	1	8	Explosives and Emeralds	08-Mar-16	0:44:17
Pacific Warriors	1	1	Open Season	23-Oct-15	0:42:35
	1	3	Heart of Darkness	06-Nov-15	0:42:35
	1	6	End of the Line	27-Nov-15	0:42:35
Swords: Life On the Line	2	1	Grand Banks or Bust	10-Aug-10	0:43:49
	2	3	Turf War	24-Aug-10	0:43:48
	2	6	Man Overboard!	14-Sep-10	0:43:49
	2	8	Trapped	28-Sep-10	0:43:49
	2	10	What It Takes to Be a Fisherman	12-Oct-10	0:43:49
Yukon Gold	1	1	Sluice or Die	13-Mar-13	0:44:05
	1	3	The Curse of Moose Creek	27-Mar-13	0:44:04
	1	6	Never Say Die	17-Apr-13	0:44:03
	1	8	Winter Gamble	01-May-13	0:44:04
	1	10	Freeze Up	15-May-13	0:44:03
Siberian Cut	1	1	Russian Roulette	03-Jun-14	0:41:35
	1	3	Civil War	17-Jun-14	0:41:35
	1	6	Road from Hell	10-Jun-15	0:41:35
Wicked Tuna	3	1	The Wicked Return	16-Feb-14	0:43:58
	3	3	Into the Storm	02-Mar-14	0:43:58
	3	5	Bite Fight	23-Mar-14	0:43:58
	3	7	Bad Latitude	07-Apr-14	0:43:58
	3	9	Brotherly Shove	27-Apr-14	0:43:58
	3	11	Tuna Beta Kappa	11-May-14	0:43:58
	3	13	Sharks and Recreation	25-May-14	0:43:58
	3	15	The Reckoning	08-Jun-14	0:43:58

6-10 Seasons

Show	**Season**	**Episode Number**	**Episode Title**		
Gold Rush	2	2	Twist of Fate	28-Oct-11	0:43:38
	2	4	Family Feud	11-Nov-11	0:43:35
	2	7	Lovestruck	02-Dec-11	0:43:35
	2	9	On the Gold	16-Dec-11	0:42:05
	2	10	Behind the Scenes	23-Dec-11	0:43:35
	2	12	Twenty Four Seven	13-Jan-12	0:43:15
	2	14	Bedrock Gold	27-Jan-12	0:43:15
	2	16	In the Black	10-Feb-12	0:43:15

	2	19	Judgement Day	24-Feb-12	0:43:15
	4	1	Queen of Diamonds	25-Oct-13	1:25:39
	4	3	In Too Deep	08-Nov-13	0:42:35
	4	6	Mutiny	29-Nov-13	0:42:35
	4	8	Jungle Boogie	13-Dec-13	0:42:35
	4	10	Hope Creek	03-Jan-14	0:42:35
	4	12	Death of a Dream	17-Jan-14	0:42:35
	4	14	Fantasy Land	24-Jan-14	0:41:35
	4	16	Man On Wire	14-Feb-14	0:41:35
	4	18	Go Big or Go Home	28-Feb-14	0:41:35
	4	20	Unearthed	14-Mar-14	0:41:35

More than 10 Seasons

Show	Season	Episode Number	Episode Title		
Deadliest Catch	1	1	Greenhorns	12-Apr-05	0:43:28
	1	3	Lady Luck	26-Apr-05	0:43:32
	1	6	Man Overboard	17-May-05	0:43:34
	1	8	Good Fishing	31-May-05	0:43:28
	1	10	The Final Run	14-Jun-05	0:43:33
	8	1	The Gamble	10-Apr-12	0:43:34
	8	3	Weak Links	24-Apr-12	0:43:34
	8	6	Vital Signs	15-May-12	0:43:34
	8	8	The Aftermath	29-May-12	1:27:41
	8	10	Rise and Fall	12-Jun-12	0:43:34
	8	12	Collision Course	26-Jun-12	0:42:34
	8	14	Fearless Leaders	10-Jul-12	0:43:34
	8	16	The Bitter, Bloody End	24-Jul-12	1:25:45
	12	1	Carpe Diem	29-Mar-16	1:25:37
	12	3	Legend of the Wizard	05-Apr-16	0:42:34
	12	6	Million-Dollar-Bet	26-Apr-16	0:42:34
	12	8	Cold War	10-May-16	0:42:34
	12	10	Into the Gale	24-May-16	0:42:34
	12	12	Raw Deal	07-Jun-16	0:42:34
	12	14	Fire at Sea: Part 1	21-Jun-16	0:42:34
	12	16	Blood & Guts	12-Jul-16	0:42:34
	12	18	The Widowmaker	26-Jul-16	1:25:36
	12	20	Sig Hansen Legacy	23-Aug-16	0:42:34

Appendix C: Template for notes during initial viewing of television episodes

Notes

NVivo Code:

Show Name:
Episode Number:
Episode Title:
Original Airdate:

Official Episode Synopsis:

Episode Description:
Key Themes/Keywords:

Notes:

Timestamp	Notes