

Representations of Polar Bears in Tourism: Exploring Power Relations through
Discourse Analysis

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

Historical and contemporary relationships between human beings and polar bears are dynamic and complex, and the lives of these two animal species continue to be intimately intertwined in the tourism context. The polar bear viewing industry increasingly relies on the (re)creation, dissemination, and maintenance of particular meanings and natures of polar bears and human-polar bear relationships for economic benefit, raising concerns about how power is circulated and negotiated through representations of polar bears in tourism promotional materials. This paper explores how the polar bear viewing industry constructs or portrays polar bears, and the social effects of these portrayals, through an examination of tourism promotional materials associated with Churchill, Manitoba, the self-proclaimed “polar bear capital of the world.” Informed by ecofeminist theory, the author explores how tourism supports and/or resists the gendered exploitation of polar bears—a social issue that intersects gender and species studies. Employing Foucauldian discourse analysis, three “kinds” of qualitative and visual texts were discursively analyzed, along with the socio-cultural context within which these texts are embedded: websites of 17 tour operators offering polar bear related tours or tourism activities in Churchill; polar bear tourism related online marketing campaigns of two (crown) tourism corporation, Travel Manitoba and the Canadian Tourism Commission; and promotional materials (e.g., postcards, souvenirs, brochures, signage, etc.) collected or observed during the author’s nearly four week stay in the town of Churchill. The author’s reflexive engagement with her own Churchill researcher/tourist experience informs, and is weaved into, this discourse analysis.

The paper shows how various representations of polar bears and the depictions of human-polar bear interactions are not impartial, but embedded contextually and within an intricate web of power relations. The author reveals how these representations express highly objectifying messages, the marginalization of polar bears and their subjective experiences, the imposition of hegemonic gender roles onto the lives of polar bears and a gendering of their environment, and an exploitative attitude toward these animals. Analysis further reveals an interspecies relationship that engages limitedly (if at all) with the notions of care, connectedness, kindness and compassion espoused by ecofeminist philosophy. The author argues for the importance of addressing the issue of species inequality, power abuse, and domination when envisioning sustainable and ethical engagements between human and other-than-human animals in wildlife tourism contexts.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Historical and contemporary relationships between human beings and polar bears are dynamic and complex, and the lives of these two animal species have been intimately intertwined for centuries in various contexts. For many years, polar bears have been key figures in the material, spiritual, and cultural lives of various indigenous Arctic communities (Water & Rose, 2009). Polar bears are also emblematic (perhaps globally) of the Arctic and its wilderness spirit, and their iconic status continues to be harnessed for human benefit. Their involvement is increasingly prominent in the tourism context. Several thousand tourists, for instance, travel annually to Churchill, Manitoba—the self-proclaimed “polar bear capital of the world”—to “experience” these animals (Lemelin & Wiersma, 2007a). The development of specially-designed tundra vehicles and mobile tundra lodges has enabled tourists to access the tundra landscape lying to the east of the town of Churchill with relative ease, to view polar bears in areas that were fairly inaccessible prior to 1980 (Lemelin & Wiersma, 2007a). However, this increasing accessibility is likely not the only factor responsible for the growth of Churchill’s polar bear tourism industry: the interest in viewing polar bears may relate to the touristic race to experience “vulnerable” places before they are “wiped out” by climate change (Lemelin et al., 2010). This emerging phenomenon is referred to as last-chance tourism, whereby “tourists explicitly seek vanishing landscapes or seascapes, and/or disappearing natural and/or social heritage” (Lemelin et al., 2010, p. 478). The possible loss of these polar destinations as a result of climate change provides a rationale for some tourists to visit them before they disappear or are irrevocably “diminished.”

Lemelin and colleagues (2010) suggest that some tour operators try to capitalize on the societal angst over climate change by aligning their products with, and marketing them as, last-chance tourism. Eijgelaar, Thaper, and Peeters (2010) acknowledge that while such tourism companies are ultimately catering to the needs of the audience (i.e., the customer), the underlying motivations behind the employment of this marketing angle or approach are difficult to discern: “Intentions range from pure commercial interest to genuine concern about the fate of these destinations” (p. 338). Regardless of the particular reasons for positioning polar experiences as “last chances,” Eijgelaar et al. (2010, p. 338) support the suggestion that polar bears have come to embody the vulnerabilities associated with Arctic change by drawing on a press release announcing that “[n]ext fall could be your last chance to see polar bears, the Kings of the North, in their natural habitat[....]It would be a shame to postpone one of the world’s greatest wildlife experiences until it’s too late” (Fresh Tracks, 2008); and a cruise theme titled “Polar bears on thin ice” (Cruise North, 2006).

Aside from the notion of vulnerability in the face of climate change, Lemelin (2006) suggests that a number of perceptions of polar bears currently exist: “many people are familiar with images of the aggressive and predatory nature of polar bears[...]the cute and adorable ‘teddy bear’, or the supposedly ‘natural’ interactions between polar bears and husky dogs” (p. 525). A diversity of portrayals and “truths” appear to circulate within the representations of polar bears, and the tourism industry participates (with increasing intensity) in co-constructing “the iconic polar bear” for the tourism audience and in coordinating and mediating the “interspecies dance” in which these popular animals have little or no choice but to “engage.” These interactions do not take place in a contextual vacuum; given the tumultuous relationships

between human beings and many other animals in Western patriarchal society, along with the often rigid priorities of a business agenda, the realities of polar bears as imagined by the various discourses of polar bear tourism require thoughtful consideration and critical examination.

Unfortunately, the tourism literature largely neglects the power dynamics of the polar bear viewing industry particularly as they relate to the instrumental nature of human-polar bear relationships in the tourism context. Research in the area of polar bear tourism is predominantly of a pragmatic nature, addressing, for example, the management of human-polar bear encounters. In these discussions, the subjectivities of polar bears are too often marginalized or altogether ignored. While it seems necessary to acknowledge the unique experiences or “gazes” of both entities when discussing or envisioning the “meeting” of two beings, encounters between the tourist and the polar bear appear to be unilateral, or one-directional, as much of the tourism literature that addresses human interactions with other animals privileges the perspective of the human being. Those studies that recognize the other-than-human animal as an integral part of these interactions focus on “impacts” as they are typically conceived in the scientific paradigm, such as the impacts of tourists on the behaviours of polar bears (see Dyck & Baydack, 2004). Limited attention has been paid to the deeper undercurrents as well as the moral and ethical dimensions of the polar bear viewing industry. Unfortunately, this inattention is unsurprising as it reflects the current state of animal research in the tourism literature; little concerns ethics (Fennell, 2012a). The instrumental and power-laden natures of the relationships between human beings and polar bears suggest that there are potential ethical concerns with regard to how polar bears are represented and used in touristic encounters for human benefit.

Through this study, I hope to contribute to tourism literature a critical perspective of the polar bear viewing industry by exploring how power is circulated and negotiated through representations of polar bears in tourism promotional materials. More specifically, my aim is to examine the discourses of polar bear tourism by analyzing the representations of polar bears in tourism promotional materials associated with Churchill, Manitoba, Canada. To this end, my thinking is meaningfully informed by ecological feminist (ecofeminist) theory. Ecofeminism offers deep and extensive insights into the power relations that are embedded within the oppressive structures of patriarchal society. As a contextual ethic, it is particularly applicable here because tourism is a global phenomenon in which the uses of animals, as well as the circumstances within which these uses occur, differ greatly. Therefore, instead of issuing universal principles to fit the dynamic tourism sphere, ecofeminism offers a lens that recognizes the multiplicity of social, political, and other factors that influence human beings' interactions with other animals. Using ecofeminist philosophy as a lens to examine how polar bears (and encounters with these animals) are constructed and presented to the audience by the tourism industry has the potential of illuminating power imbalances in these human-polar bear relationships and the associated ethics-related concerns.

Informed by the theoretical perspective of ecofeminism, the three research questions guiding this study are:

- 1) What construction(s) of truth in relation to polar bears does tourism privilege?
- 2) How are particular meanings of polar bears produced, favoured, and accepted as knowledge?

- 3) How are social inequality, power abuse, and domination of polar bears reproduced or resisted in discourses of polar bear tourism? Given the theoretical orientation of this study, I am particularly interested in exploring how gendered animal stereotypes are engaged in discourses of polar bear tourism and the extent to which these discourses support, recreate, or resist a gendered exploitation of polar bears.

A compelling approach to addressing and exploring these questions is to examine discourse (i.e., interpret meanings produced through texts and representations), as

it is often not easy for people to understand the world around them (what is a plant, a human, or an animal), who they are (self) and what they *do* with, and their *attitudes* towards, other people and the bio-physical environment outside of the linguistic structures available to them. (original emphasis, Waitt, 2005. p.164)

As power relations are of central concern to this study, the above research questions are informed by a specific philosophical approach to the relationship between power and discourse—Foucauldian discourse analysis. This methodology played a significant role in the creation of the research questions guiding this study and was as integral in addressing them. An in-depth discussion of discourse analysis is presented in Chapter 3: Research Approach, following a review of the literature relevant to this research project.

CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Tourism and Animal Ethics

Although the application of ethics to tourism is advancing in the literature, few works consider other-than-human animals. Representing a minority, these tourism scholars extend the discussion to include animals. In *Tourism and Animal Ethics*, Fennell (2012a) provides a thorough account of the numerous uses of animals in the tourism industry, ranging from encounters with free-roaming animals (such as in wildlife tourism contexts) to those with captive animals in entirely contrived settings (as in the case of circuses and zoos). As Fennell explains, these animals are employed and valued by the tourism industry for a variety of reasons, including the perceived usefulness of their physical strengths, senses, and entertainment potential. In his discussion, Fennell draws on a variety of ethics theories to explore the ethical issues associated with these various uses of animals by the tourism industry.

Zoos have been the subject of much debate and are perhaps the most commonly discussed attractions that rely on animals, given the pervasiveness of these institutions, the nature of captivity and the questionable welfare of animals, among other factors. Although the captive environment may drastically differ from the viewing of animals in their natural habitats (such as in polar bear viewing tourism), the themes of objectification, marginalization, and commodification stemming from this literature are important to review.

The appropriateness of zoos has been approached from various angles, such as welfare and morality. Agoramoorthy (2004) examines the well-being of the animals in Southeast Asian zoos, reflecting on existing efforts to improve the conditions of animals and offering novel suggestions, while Beardsworth and Bryman (2001) discuss the transformations of modern zoos

that lead to the commodification of the wild. Contrastingly, Jamieson (1985) defends that it is immoral to keep animals in zoos. After debunking the common arguments in favour of zoos (such as entertainment, education, and preservation of species), Jamieson asserts that ultimately,

Zoos teach us a false sense of our place in the natural order. The means of confinement mark a difference between humans and animals. They are there at our pleasure, to be used for our purposes[...]Because what zoos teach us is false and dangerous, both humans and animals will be better off when they are abolished. (p. 117)

What we need, Mason (2000) proposes, is more research in zoo tourism. He suggests we ask such questions as: “Should animals be kept in captivity to entertain visitors?” “Are zoos appropriate attractions given concern for animal welfare?” “Is it not better to view animals in their natural setting than in captivity?” And “[d]o zoos encourage visitors to anthropomorphise and trivialise natural heritage and wildlife (e.g. cuddly pandas, friendly chimps, cunning snakes)?” (p. 337).

The themes of marginalization and objectification of animals are prominent in this body of literature, wherever animals are exhibited in some form of staged or themed space. Although there has been a prominent and evident shift toward a naturalistic presentation of captive animals (Hannam, 2011), many researchers are sceptical about the motivation for this change. Citing Bostock (1993), Hannam (2011) argues that

the “best” enclosures are “naturalistic” ones that provide the “illusion” that the animals seen are “in the wild”, but such “furnishings” may be for the benefit of the human visitors as much as they are actually for the animals themselves. (p. 113)

What persists in the minds of the sceptics (and emanates from their work) is the issue of captivity, regardless of how it is camouflaged. By confining and displaying animals in prison-like environments, humans marginalize them, i.e., humans treat the animals' subjective experiences and needs as insignificant or peripheral to their own. Berger (1980) asserts that "[t]he zoo to which people go to meet animals, to observe them, to see them, is, in fact, a monument to the impossibility of such encounters" (p. 19). Berger's (1980) interprets zoos as institutions that allow people to observe living objects as if they were dead.

Once human beings make animals a marginalized group, they can objectify the animals more readily, treat them as objects and means to human ends. Unsurprisingly, the zoo has been called a form of museum. As Mason (2011) explains, a traditional museum conserves and exhibits objects of cultural value. He suggests that wild animals can be regarded as having cultural value because they are part of human heritage. The zoo, then, is a "repository of living objects with cultural value" (p. 192). Absent is the recognition of animals as agents or actors in their own right; instead they are manipulated like objects. The growing popularity of naturalistic displays is contradictory to the observation of some tourism scholars that given the way animals are displayed in zoos, visitors sometimes leave with more negative and dominator-like attitudes than they had when they entered (Bulbeck, 2005, p. 199). The objectification of animals in these institutions is pervasive:

zoo research often adopts the values of science, including objectification—'non-human nature is seen largely as an object for human use and benefit'—and reductionism, breaking nature down into 'sets of knowable or observable elements and events', thus ignoring complex interactions (Mazur, 2001, p. 75 as cited in Bulbeck, 2005, p. 200)

The commodification and consumption of performing animals is also a key part of tourism activities that are based in captive environments (Desmond, 1999). In these scenarios, the notion of domination is even more apparent and perhaps principal to the act. Kontogeorgopoulos (2009) cites the research of Kellert (1996) and Orams (2002) to explain that prevalent in the animal-based tourism industry is the dominionistic view in which animals are under the dominion of human beings. This view manifests itself through the emphasis in these institutions on mastery, domination, and control of animals. Desmond (1999), for example, examines animal performances at marine theme parks and finds that whales are forced to perform under strict hierarchies of power and domination. Much like displays of animals in cages, staged performances attempt to reaffirm that human beings are superior to and distinct from these wild animals (Desmond, 1999). Desmond remarks that unlike the words of mutual love and dependence put forth by these institutions, they facilitate, uphold, and promote instrumental relationships—relationships of use that are inherent in the dominant Western environmental paradigm (Desmond, 1999).

Wearing and Jobberns (2011) directly address the commodification of animals in the ecotourism context (the viewing of free-roaming animals is often characterized as ecotourism in the literature). They assert that for ecotourism to present itself as a morally superior alternative, it must “philosophically align itself to environmental ethics” and “include in its agenda the rights of animals” (p. 57). To accomplish this, the authors propose that “decommodification principles and practices” are introduced into the “global ecotourism community” (p. 58). In a similar vein, Hall and Brown (2006) conclude that ecotourism must involve a more ethically appropriate encounter with the rest of the natural world if it is to remain an alternative to less conscionable

forms of tourism. Since animal-based attractions, according to Shani and Pizam (2008), will not disappear in the near future, the goal should be to improve the welfare of the animals involved in these situations. Shani and Pizam suggest that precise ethical guidelines for animal-based attractions should stem from three main principles: entertainment, education, and animal welfare. (See also Malloy & Fennel (1998) and Fennell & Malloy (2007) for a thorough discussion of codes of ethics in tourism).

It is unclear whether the animal advocacy movement has had an influence on the use and treatment of animals in the tourism industry, or its scope if such influence does exist. However, indications that at least some change has occurred can be found in the tourism literature that examines the ethics of specific tourism activities that involve other-than-human animals. For example, by chronicling the shift in UK dolphin tourism, Hughes (2001) shows how the “deliberate promotion of an animal rights perspective has brought about a structural transformation in tourism provision” (abstract). Although Hughes focuses on dolphin tourism, he notes that the commonality between all these tourism activities is that they view animals as objects rather than subjects. Hughes stressed how important it is for all tourism stakeholders (including tourism researchers) to recognize the significance of animals as individual actors.

Fennell (2000) attempts to remove the commodification of animals as prey through the practice of fishing from the realm of acceptable ecotourism behaviour. He does so by clarifying the nature of “non-consumptiveness” and its philosophical importance to ecotourism ideology. Ecotourism is a status normally reserved for non-consumptive activities. Catch-and-release fishing, therefore, has generally been assumed to fit into the ecotourism realm. Fennell argues, however, that fishing should not be viewed as a form of ecotourism because of the nature of the

activity (the intention to entrap the animal and the pain this causes) and the consumptiveness of the activity (despite the eventual release of the fish back into their waters). He concludes that “there is something intuitively wrong with fishing as ecotourism” (p. 14). Incorporating these concepts of stress and abuse, Fennell suggests that the definition of ecotourism be modified to include “ethically based behaviour, programmes and models of tourism development which do not intentionally stress living and non-living elements of the environments in which it occurs” (p. 15).

Others have more directly drawn on the moral philosophies of the animal advocacy movement (e.g., utilitarianism, animal rights view) or theories of environmental ethics (e.g., ecocentrism) to better understand human relationships with other animals. For example, in an article titled “Tourism and animal rights”, Fennell (2012b) investigates the extent to which animal rights theory (in particular Tom Regan’s views) has permeated the mainstream of tourism research and identifies some challenges of aligning tourism with animal rights. In his “Tourism, animals and ethics: Utilitarianism”, Fennell (2012c) employs utilitarian theory (in particular Peter Singer’s views) in an attempt to more clearly understand the consequences of the use of animals in tourism. In doing so, he explores how utilitarian thinking can help in our consideration of the moral acceptability of certain tourism practices, especially zoos. Both of these works demonstrate Fennell’s argument that it is important to introduce animal ethics theories into tourism discourse because of the vast number of ways the tourism industry uses animals for commercial and personal benefit.

2.2 Tourism and Ecofeminist Philosophy

The benefits of borrowing and applying theories from other disciplines are enormous. A plethora of perspectives and philosophies, however, remain overlooked by tourism scholars. Ecological feminism (ecofeminism) has received little attention in the tourism literature. Just as there is not one feminism, there is not one ecofeminism or ecofeminist philosophy. Ecofeminism can be seen as the “offspring” of feminism (Gaard, 2002), and thus reflects different and distinct feminism positions (e.g., liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism) (Warren, 1997). Ecofeminism as a political movement began in the 1970s (Buckingham, 2004). French feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne first coined the term “ecological feminism” in 1974 to signify a women-led ecological revolution (Warren, 2000). Since then, ecofeminism has developed and diversified, today understood as an umbrella term for a variety of positions. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some core themes of this philosophy or, in other words, the “presuppositions, principles, precepts, or beliefs that shape ecofeminist thought” (Howell, 1997, p. 233).

Broadly speaking, there are two main strands of ecofeminist thought: essentialist and conceptualist (also referred to as constructivist). The essentialist position builds on the belief that women have a unique relationship with nature by virtue of their biology and thus are more likely to care about nature and speak on her behalf (King, 1991). However, conceptualist interpretations of ecofeminism more commonly inform ecofeminist literature (Buckingham, 2004). These ecofeminist theorists maintain that the oppressions of women and nature overlap, and underlying both is the tendency of patriarchal culture to frame men and culture as opposite of women and nature. Thus, most ecofeminists work from the understanding of the intersecting

nature of oppressions (Jones, 2010), particularly the oppressions of women and nature in patriarchal society. Patriarchy is “the systematic domination of women by men through *institutions* (including policies, practices, offices, positions, roles), *behaviors*, and *ways of thinking* (conceptual frameworks), which assign higher value, privilege, and power to men[...]than to that given to women” (original emphasis, Warren, 2000, p. 64). Underlying the domination of women and nature in this oppressive patriarchal system is a series of dualisms: culture/nature, reason/nature, male/female, mind/body, reason/emotion, universal/particular, civilized/primitive, subject/object, self/other (Plumwood, 1991, p. 43). While the first of each pair is presumed superior, the second (or subordinate) member is considered “closer to nature” (Gaard, 1997, p. 119). This dualistic thinking hinges on the oppositional construction of “male” and “female” as well as “masculinity” and “femininity.” As Plumwood (1991) explains:

it is not only women but also the earth’s wild living things that have been denied possession of a reason thus construed along masculine and oppositional lines and which contrasts not only with the “feminine” emotions but also with the physical and the animal. Much of the problem (both for women and nature) lies in rationalist or rationalist-derived conceptions of the self and of what is essential and valuable in the human makeup. It is in the name of such a reason that these other things—the feminine, the emotional, the merely bodily or the merely animal, and the natural world itself—have most often been denied their virtue and been accorded an inferior and merely instrumental position. (p. 287)

The oppositional nature of dualistic thinking contributes to the domination of both nature and women by positioning human beings (men, in particular) as separate from and above nature,

while constructing women and nature as the “other” that fails to conform to the masculine norm (Kheel, 2009). (This dualistic thinking is discussed in more detail in Section 6.1: Tourism, Patriarchy, and Dualistic Thought).

Ecofeminists are critical of the masculine bias in many mainstream ethics theories that interpret and represent a particular connection between human beings and the rest of nature. Ecofeminists describe these theories as rationalist or hyperrationalist; preoccupied with the ideas of rights and justice, they uphold the false dualism that frames emotion as subordinate to reason (Plumwood, 1991). A number of animal ethics and environmental philosophies base the concept of morality on reason, viewing the emotional, the personal, and the particular as its enemy (Plumwood, 1991). For example, holist philosophies, such as Aldo Leopold’s land ethic, “typically care about ‘species,’ ‘the ecosystem’ or ‘the biotic community’ over and above individual beings” (Kheel, 2008, p. 2). Individual members of the biotic community are considered subordinate to the whole. As Vance (1995) writes

The land ethic does not allow for the consideration of particularly situated individuals: everything exists as a specimen, a representative of a type, and is judged as such. An individual life has no value—unless, of course, that individual is among the last of its kind.

(p. 174)

Similarly, two influential philosophers of the animal advocacy movement, Peter Singer (defending a utilitarian position) and Tom Regan (defending an animal rights position), both “devalue personal and affective ties” and derogate emotion as unreliable and untrustworthy (Kheel, 2008, p. 17). These philosophies polarize reason and emotion, privileging the former (Kheel, 1996a). While the two perspectives are very distinct from one another in many ways,

ecofeminist thinkers criticize them for their shared masculinist orientation and the privileging of the masculine conception of morality (Plumwood, 1991). These predominantly rationalist perspectives leave “no room in this narrative for kindness, affection, delight, wonder, respect, generosity, or love” (Vance, 1995, p. 172).

As an alternative to these mainstream philosophies, ecofeminist theory pays thoughtful attention to the personal, the contextual, the emotional, and the political (Donovan, 2006). Ecofeminists try to dissolve the dichotomies of the rationalist perspectives by envisioning “a kind of unity of reason and emotion” (Kheel, 1996a, p. 48). As Ruddick (1980) writes, “Intellectual activities are distinguishable, but not separable from disciplines of feeling. There is a unity of reflection, judgement, and emotion” (p. 348). An important element of ecofeminist philosophy (and one that is reflected in the passages cited above) is the notion of an ethic of care which “underscores the role of empathy as a vital link between humans and the rest of the natural world” (Kheel, 2009, p. 45). Ecofeminism encourages humans to engage their sympathies toward the well-being and integrity of individual beings as well as larger wholes (Kheel, 2008). Donovan (2006) suggests that this animal care ethic “must be political in its perspective and dialogical in its method”, meaning that while we should learn “to hear, to take seriously, to care about what animals are telling us” (Donovan, 2006, p. 324), we must also develop a political perspective, or “political consciousness” (Adams & Procter-Smith, 1993) so we can become aware of the environment in which the suffering and caring about suffering take place (Adams, 1996).

Narratives of ecofeminist philosophy articulate the lived and experienced connections between the dominations of women and nature, and are widely encompassing. While other-than-human animals are recognized as being a part of nature, they are not explicitly a part of

ecofeminist analysis. In early ecofeminism literature, the domination of animals was not considered a significant aspect of the domination of nature. Today, however, while some theorists still do not address the topic of animals, others directly emphasize the oppression of animals in their analyses (Gaard, 2002). Quite often they examine the various contexts (e.g., political, economic) of dietary choices given that other-than-human animals are perhaps most intensely exploited through the practice of meat eating (Gaard, 2002). This branch of ecofeminism that acknowledges the experiences of animals is referred to as vegetarian ecofeminism (Gaard, 2002). Vegetarian ecofeminism has been explicitly articulated through the work of scholars and activists such as Carol Adams, Josephine Donovan, Marti Kheel, Linda Vance, Greta Gaard, Lori Gruen, Brian Luke and Deborah Slicer. These scholars (and many others who I have not mentioned here) believe that excluding the oppression of other-than-human animals from ecofeminist analyses creates an incomplete picture of the realities of Western patriarchal society.

Despite its applicability and usefulness to the tourism context, ecofeminism has received scant attention in tourism literature. In *Tourism Ethics* (2006), Fennell offers a brief discussion of the potential benefits of extending to the tourism context Carol Gilligan's work on the differences in men's and women's conceptualizations of morality. He suggests, for instance, that the discussion about tourism ethics and codes of conduct may benefit from the acknowledgment that there may be a difference in what men and women consider to be acceptable tourism practices and behaviours. In *The Ethics of Tourism Development*, Smith and Duffy (2003) also apply the ethic of care to the tourism context, noting a masculinist bias in tourism discourse and

highlighting that an ecofeminist perspective would require sensitivity to the contextual particularities within which tourism research is carried out.

Discussions that directly explore the connections between ecofeminism, animals, and tourism can be found in few works: For example, in *Tourism and animal ethics*, Fennell (2012a) offers a brief suggestion that the ecofeminist perspective ought to be integrated into the discussion on tourism, animals, and ethics. A more thorough engagement with ecofeminist philosophy can be found in Bulbeck's (2005) *Facing the wild: Ecotourism, conservation and animal encounters*. Bulbeck applies insights of ecofeminism and the ethic of care to advance a hybridized approach to human-animal interactions—an approach she calls “respectful stewardship of a hybrid nature” (p. 197). She proposes that we acknowledge the instrumental nature of relationships (i.e., relationships of use) but limit this instrumentalism through a meaningful dialogue with other-than-human animals. Bulbeck encourages us to transform our perceptions of nature by recognizing its complexity and that it is neither pure nor untouched, but encompasses instrumental relationships. Respectful stewardship of this hybrid nature “requires responsiveness to the particularities of relationships rather than monochrome worldviews. It requires knowledge as well as love. It requires patience as well as conviction. It requires submission as well as mastery” (p. 197). However, Bulbeck acknowledges that even “authentic” animal encounters are open to commodification. Although she describes respectful stewardship in a compelling voice, she admits to the difficulty of addressing our consumer identities by asking “What chance do we really have of decentring ourselves and our needs to attend carefully to the desires of others?” (p. 198).

Yudina and Fennell (2013) also bring ecofeminist philosophy into the tourism context, exploring the use of animals as food in tourism and drawing on the work of ecofeminist theorists to highlight the morally relevant aspects of these encounters. Extending existing theoretical applications of ecofeminism to animal food production and consumption in tourism (such as Carol Adams' "absent referent"), Yudina and Fennell aim to demonstrate the relevance and potential contribution of ecofeminist philosophy to "tourism practices that are not only sustainable but morally defensible" (p. 66). While the authors acknowledge the contextual sensitivities of ecofeminist philosophy, they stress the urgent need for ethically-informed reflection on and investigation of our behaviours as tourists, as "[i]t appears that in many tourism-related contexts, the current uses of animals are morally repugnant" (p. 66).

Although ecofeminist philosophy has not been readily embraced by tourism scholars, ecofeminists have engaged their philosophy in various circumstances and contexts involving the linked oppression of women and nature (including other-than-human animals), some of which lie in the sphere of tourism practice. Fox (1997) explores the role of leisure in women's lives. She insists that leisure provides a context for or a connection with nature, contributing to a healthy and self-affirming lifestyle, although the definition of leisure is not typically defined by such relationships and connections. Fox explores how women can use leisure to resist oppression, but stresses that some leisure practices can themselves be oppressive to women and nature. For example, "The rise in consumptive outdoor pursuits such as motorboating[...]has damaged many fragile ecosystems. Ecotourism is growing in popularity even as local people are suffering and natural areas declining from the same activity" (p. 169). Consequently, Fox urges that we

examine not only how women use leisure to resist oppression and violence but also how leisure is used to oppress women and nature.

While Fox explores leisure broadly, several theorists write about specific types of tourism, namely those that exploit animals for entertainment. Both Cataldi (2002) and Carmeli (2002) discuss the circus, their examinations informed by an ecofeminist perspective. Carmeli chronicles the debate about circus animal presentations, exploring how the various criticisms of animal performances relate to the general transformations in attitude toward animals and the rest of nature. Cataldi more directly applies an ecofeminist perspective to the circus, exploring the dignity of the other-than-human animals involved in these “undignified performances”. She draws on the construction of the “momma bear” in typical circuses to argue that a “moral sense of dignity” (p. 105) must be extended to other-than-human animals. Jones (2010), on the other hand, critically explores cockfighting—a tourism practice that is particularly violent and cruel—with the help of a gender analysis. She argues that cockfighting exhibits the imposition of gender as “a culturally determined collection of ideas and practices” (p. 368) onto animals:

In the most basic form of social construction of gender by way of animals, animal behavior is simply perceived and/or interpreted in a manner consistent with sex-role stereotypes. In a more pernicious variant, animals are coerced or tricked into behaving in a manner consistent with human ideas about gender. (p. 368)

Embracing and perpetuating gendered animal stereotypes, the cockfighting industry depicts roosters as “inherently combative” (p. 369). Acknowledging the interlocking oppressions of marginalized humans and other animals, Jones (2010) explores how cockfighting (and gendered exploitation of roosters forced into this practice) are harmful to both people and animals.

Vegetarian ecofeminists are perhaps best known for their critiques of animal food production/consumption and of hunting (Gaard, 2002). The uses of animals as food are directly pertinent to the tourism context since tourists inevitably engage in eating practices while traveling. One of the most prominent ecofeminists is Carol J. Adams, whose books *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990) and *The Pornography of Meat* (2004) elucidate the links between the oppression of women and that of other-than-human animals. More specifically, she discusses the connections between feminism and vegetarianism, and patriarchy and meat eating. Adams, along with many other ecofeminists (such as Marti Kheel), direct much of their attention on the institution of intensive factory farming and the relationships with animals it upholds. One of Adams' most notable contributions is the "absent referent": she explains that every meal of meat obscures the death of the animal whose place the meat has taken. The "absent referent" is that which separates the meat eater from the animal and the animal from the end product (Adams, 1990). Adams (1990) explains that the function of the absent referent is to keep our "meat" separated from any idea that she or he was once an animal, "to keep *something* from being seen as having been someone" (p. 13).

The prominence, nature and complexity of hunting practice are also of interest to theorists and have yielded ecofeminist exploration and critique. Kheel (1996b) evaluates the strategies hunters use to legitimize their desire to hunt, making distinctions among types of hunters based on their self-professed motives for hunting. She identifies three categories of hunters based on the particular need they argue hunting fulfills: the "happy hunter" hunts for the purpose of enjoyment and pleasure, as well as character development (psychological need); the "holist hunter" hunts for the purpose of maintaining the balance of nature (ecological need);

and the “holy hunter” hunts in order to attain a spiritual state (religious need). She demonstrates that these differences are not as pronounced as they may appear. According to Kheel, most hunters ignore the question of the animal’s subjective experience: they fail to consider the needs or interests of the animal. Instead, Kheel argues, they refer to the purity of their own motives and desires to defend their actions, their arguments self-absorbed and self-interested.

In a similar vein, Adams (1991) explores if the way in which an animal is killed to be food affects whether the action of killing and the consumption of the dead animal are deemed acceptable. Some theorists argue that killing animals in a respectful act of appreciation does not reduce animals to means to an end. Instead, this method is rooted in a relationship of reciprocity between the hunters and the hunted animals. Adams terms this method the “relational hunt” and offers several criticisms. Although hunter motivations are important to understand, Adams (1991) argues that the morally relevant distinction comes down to the following: “We either see animals as edible bodies or we do not” (p. 140).

2.3 Human-Polar Bear Interactions

The uses of animals in tourism as well as the contexts of these uses differ greatly. Through the introduction of more exotic species into its realm, wildlife tourism is becoming increasingly diversified (Whittaker, 1997). Among the numerous elements of the local environment that draw tourists to the Arctic region, the viewing of wildlife remains a key attractor (Johnston, 1995). The polar bear viewing industry has become a notable component of wildlife tourism; the demand for polar bear viewing across the world is increasing (Brown, 2006 as cited in Lemelin, 2008, p. 93). This occurs in a variety of ways and settings: bears can be

viewed from cruise ships in the archipelago of Svalbard, Norway and from helicopters and tundra vehicles in Churchill, Canada (Lemelin, 2008).

Consequently, the meanings of polar bears, along with human encounters and relationships with these animals, are increasingly complex. Research in this area has tended to focus on polar bear population dynamics and impacts. For example, Dyck and Baydack (2004) examine the effects of tundra vehicle activities during polar bear viewing by measuring the vigilance behaviour (a scanning of the immediate vicinity and beyond) of resting polar bears. The study stresses the importance of studying the impacts of polar bear viewing on polar bears, such as how distances between vehicles and bears, tundra vehicle activity in the immediate vicinity of a bear during viewing, and noise of tourists affect the bears.

Although Dyck and Baydack (2004) address the impacts of human activity on polar bears, their study reflects an anthropocentric approach to human-polar bear interactions. This is also characteristic of tourism literature; research in this area is predominantly of a pragmatic nature and focuses on the human dimensions of the experience. For example, several studies aim to explore the perceptions and motivations of polar bear viewing tourists in the context of global climate change. Lemelin and Wiersma (2007b) focus on themes relating to environmental dimensions of polar bear tourism as they are perceived by polar bear viewing tourists. These themes include environmental concerns, rationalization of wildlife tourism, and perceptions of environmental impacts. Their findings indicate that while participants expressed concerns over environmental issues, detachment between behaviours and environmental issues was evident in a number of comments. These findings are compatible with those of Lemelin et al. (2008) who use a comprehensive index of specialization to examine tourists visiting Churchill, Manitoba to

view polar bears. Broadly speaking, this index reflects the spectrum of ecotourists, from soft/shallow to hard/deep ecotourists. The results suggest that these visitors reflect a wide range of levels of specialization, and the majority of visitors are novices who might not share the same degree of concern for the environment or the same motives for visiting as their more specialized counterparts.

The focus on perceptions of environmental impacts are not surprising given that tourists typically travel long distances to view polar bears, in turn contributing to greenhouse gas emissions that are negatively affecting the lives of these animals. Dawson et al. (2010) examine the paradoxical issue surrounding long-distance tourism to view polar bears, arguing that this form of tourism is disproportionately responsible for greenhouse gas emissions that are negatively affecting the survival chances of polar bears. In their study, Dawson et al. (2010) aim to understand the perceptions that tourists hold regarding climate change and to reveal the extent to which respondents comprehend the relationship between human actions and the perpetuation of climate change. Their findings are congruent with other studies of a similar nature, suggesting that despite a general understanding of the potential impacts of climate change, polar bear viewing tourists do not understand how their behaviours (e.g., long-haul flights to the destination) contribute to climate change.

Lemelin (2006) takes a different approach to understanding human-polar bear relationships, an approach concerned with the undercurrents of these relationships and the social and ethical repercussions of the polar bear viewing industry. He examines the relationship between photography, the wildlife tourist gaze, and ocular consumption in the context of polar bear viewing in Churchill, Manitoba. While the viewing of free-roaming animals is often

characterized as a non-consumptive activity, Lemelin highlights the “visual consumption” of the animals involved in wildlife viewing experiences. He refers to this as “ocular consumption,” a concept that is inextricably linked to the objectification of animals in tourism. Lemelin argues that wildlife tourism activities are in danger of reducing into a gawk, “a form of entertainment or a quest for collectables” (p. 531). This leads him to ask some important questions of the tourism industry: “what do you want to provide the wildlife tourist with? The opportunity to photograph a big cuddly animal? Or the opportunity to see and understand an extraordinary rare and complex creature, living its life in its natural environment?” (Lemelin, 2006, p. 531).

As this review has demonstrated, much of the tourism literature that addresses human and other-than-human animal interactions privileges the perspective of the human being, the tourist. Those studies that recognize the animal as an integral part of this interaction focus on impacts, such as the impacts of tourists on the behaviours of polar bears. In a book chapter titled “Human-polar bear interactions in Churchill, Manitoba: The socio-ecological perspective”, Lemelin (2008) examines polar bear-human interactions in the Churchill area, paying close attention to the growing wildlife tourism industry (i.e., polar bear tourism) at the end of the 20th century, and the role of the community of Churchill in the management of polar bears. In concluding his chapter, Lemelin admits that “[o]ne stakeholder rarely mentioned in this article and the literature is perhaps the most important of all—the polar bear. The polar bears are the attractions, and without them, there would be no industry” (p. 103).

2.4 Tourism and Marketing: Animals as Icons

Much literature has explored the use of images and the creation of iconic representations in tourism marketing (for example, Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002; Hunter,

2008). Some have done this through a gender analysis (for example, after analyzing tourism promotional materials, Pritchard and Morgan (2000) conclude that the language and imagery of promotion privileges the male, heterosexual gaze). However, this type of discussion has been scarcely extended to the use of animals as icons in tourism marketing, even though the industry often creates animal icons to help promote a destination and to forge a connection between tourists and place.

Among the most direct of such works is Tremblay's (2002) "Tourism wildlife icons: Attractions or marketing symbols?" in which he examines the use of wildlife icons as marketing devices. He attempts to determine whether the choice and effectiveness of appropriate icons is mainly dependent on the attractiveness of specific species or their relevance to the environment they represent. Tremblay suggests that certain attributes are key to the creation of an animal icon. Most importantly, the animal must possess positive and charismatic traits, such as being perceived as approachable, cute, playful, or curious. According to Tremblay, the ability to anthropomorphize the animal's actions is paramount, because people tend to connect better with and find appealing those animals who more closely resemble themselves. For this reason, some animals are anthropomorphized—assigned positive human-like characteristics—in the process of becoming tourism commodities.

Sometimes the commodified natures imposed on animals rely on emotions that are quite opposite of those felt for "cute" and "cuddly" creatures; they rely on the fascination with fear and disgust. Dobson (2006; 2011) explores how sharks have been cast in this role. In "Fun, fascination and fear: Exploring the construction and consumption of aquarium shark exhibits", Dobson (2011) explores the recent growth of aquaria, focusing on how they interpret and

represent sharks. He suggests that aquariums and diving tours use negative representations of sharks to generate interest in their products. According to Dobson (2011), such operations concede that while the use of negative stereotypes related to sharks is paradoxical to conservation and education initiatives, they are effective at selling the product. With this mindset, tourism establishments openly trade “on the ‘fascination with fear’ and ‘shark as monster’ messages” (p. 92).

Closely connected to the use of animal icons in tourism marketing is the notion of commodification. Not only do animals become symbols through various invented meanings, they become tangible symbols through merchandising. Beardsworth and Bryman (2001) discuss a variety of contemporary developments in zoos and wildlife parks, suggesting that zoos are exhibiting a tendency toward Disneyization, an important component of which is merchandizing. They maintain that merchandising has become a vital revenue stream for zoos and aquaria, and that the range of merchandise offered is likely to increase because of the growing commercialism of these institutions. Merchandizing relies on iconic animals, and “the presentation of animals and animal performances by zoos can feed directly into the generation of commoditized images, which can have considerable commercial potential” (p. 96).

In the polar bear tourism context, there appears to be a conflation of the objectification of the animal and his or her victimization as some have suggested that polar bears are presented as vulnerable victims of climate change (for example, Eijgelaar et al., 2010). The results of studies on polar bear population dynamics in the context of global climate change are complicated, contradictory, and somewhat controversial. My goal here is not to conduct an in-depth review of climate change science, but to note that arguments exist on both sides of the debate. Some

studies emphasize the importance of context, stating that polar bears are not all equally affected by the changing Arctic climate (see Cherry, 2011). However, it is questionable whether the diversity of scholarly and scientific opinions are considered and captured in tourism marketing. It seems that last-chance tourism is more concerned with the *perception* of vulnerability among the general public (Dawson et al., 2011). Moreover, polar bears are not the only animals affected by climate change: Wolf (2010), for example, explores how climate change is affecting (and threatening) the Arctic ecosystem, discussing the impact of climate change on such Arctic wildlife as Arctic whales, seabirds, and terrestrial mammals. While many of these other species of animals are affected, it is possible that polar bears have come to embody the vulnerabilities associated with Arctic change and are the primary icons of climate change in the North, while other animals have interestingly not made the spotlight.

In examining how last-chance tourism is promoted in various tourism marketing strategies, Lemelin, Dawson, Stewart, Maher, and Lueck (2010) discuss some of the potential risks associated with last-chance tourism. Although direct attention is not paid to ethical considerations, this discussion of risks is closely related to and helps illuminate the ethical dimensions of last-chance tourism activities. In a much more explicit manner, Dawson et al. (2011) examine the various ethical issues associated with the marketing and management of last-chance tourism. They state that a key question for the emerging last-chance tourism sector is whether it is morally appropriate for the tourism industry or local communities to market vulnerable attractions as a tactic to achieve increased tourist visitation and revenues. While the authors acknowledge an array of pros and cons of marketing last-chance tourism, they note that intent to capitalize on that which is clearly vulnerable is ethically suspect.

As the involvement of polar bears in the tourism industry intensifies, academic scholarship remains in a stasis. As this review of literature seems to suggest, academic tourism discourse largely fails to explore the moral intricacies, power relations, and ethical implications of the polar bear viewing industry. Despite its great potential in examining these power relationships and possible imbalances, ecofeminism has received very little attention from tourism scholars, and has not yet been applied to the polar bear viewing tourism context.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH APPROACH

3.1 Methodology: Discourse Analysis

3.1.1 Philosophical Foundations of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

There is not one distinct conceptualisation or understanding of discourse analysis (Hannam & Knox, 2005). Instead, a diversity of theoretical perspectives informs this methodology, culminating in a number of approaches (Spencer, 2011). Thus “discourse analysis” is at times considered a somewhat ambiguous term; although it appears to be a “unified approach at first glance, with the ‘credibility’ that such status can claim”, upon closer examination “it seems to be only a loose alliance” (Toolan, 1997, p. 99). I employed an approach to discourse analysis that is largely influenced by the work of Michel Foucault—a French post-structuralist philosopher and historian—commonly referred to as Foucauldian (or Foucaultian) discourse analysis. Although this offers a refined focus, even the various researchers who have adopted the Foucauldian concept of discourse “are not linked by a fully integrated common research paradigm” (Diaz-Bone et al., 2008, p. 7). However, in the last decade, different research groups have acknowledged shared commonalities, which is why today one can speak of an emerging field of Foucauldian discourse analysis (Diaz-Bone et al., 2008).

Broadly speaking, Foucault wanted to reveal the relationship between discourse, power, and social institutions. He conceptualized discourses as “conventional ways of talking that both create and are created by conventional ways of thinking. These linked ways of talking and thinking constitute ideologies (set of interrelated ideas) and serve to circulate power in society” (Johnstone, 2002, p. 3). Hence “discourse” in Foucault’s conception is not dialogue, nor is it centrally focused on language (Fairclough, 1995; 1996). Instead, it focuses on what happens

when people draw on the knowledge they have about language to do things in the world: “exchange information, express feelings, make things happen, create beauty, entertain themselves and others, and so on” (Johnstone, 2002, p. 3). While the knowledge itself is referred to as language, discourse refers to both “the source of this knowledge (people’s generalizations about language are made on the basis of the discourse they participate in) and the result of it (people apply what they already know in creating and interpreting new discourse” (Johnstone, 2002, p. 3). Thus, discourses comprise bodies of knowledge or systems of languages that establish distinct ways of communication (Pritchard & Jaworski, 2005), imparting authority or an “expert” status to those possessing that particular knowledge (Diaz-Bone et al., 2008).

The notion of power is of central concern in Foucauldian discourse analysis; it is this emphasis on power that differentiates Foucault’s discourse analysis from other types of linguistic analyses (Wickham & Kendall, 2008). Foucault conceptualized discourse as “the web of correspondences through which power is constituted” (Spencer, 2011, p. 159). There are many discourses operating around us, some of which clearly contend with each other. However, a particular discourse is often dominant (Rose, 2007). This discourse is normally located in powerful social institutions and makes claims to absolute truth (Rose, 2007, p. 144). Power produces discourse: particular meanings and practices become observed as “normal” or “natural”, they become privileged and accepted as truth or knowledge because of these dominant discourses and the socially powerful institutions in which they are embedded (Waitt, 2005).

However, in Foucault’s conception of discourse, power is not something imposed on individuals from some source at the top of the hierarchical chain of society; instead, “Power is

everywhere, since discourse too is everywhere” (Rose, 2007, p. 143). So, although power produces discourse, it also operates through discourse (Waitt, 2005). Hence discourse is productive. While it dictates ways of thinking and acting, it is not simply repressive (Rose, 2007). Instead, power is circulated and negotiated through discourse; “It is these negotiations of how the individual is positioned to the discursive norms that has the potential to be disempowering through compliance, or empowering through resistance” (Waitt, 2005, p. 174). Because discourse constructs the subjects and objects of which it speaks, different discourses create and reinforce different constructions and understandings of human and other-than-human animal subjects, objects, relations, and so on (Frith, 2011). In other words, alternative and contending discourses produce other ways of knowing; they may compete with and contradict dominant discourses and their effects of truth. Active resistance to dominant discourses can thus be empowering for those whose voices are subverted by powerful discursive practices, bringing alternative ways of thinking and doing to the forefront.

Considering Foucault’s conception of discourse, discourse analysis “examines how discourses are constituted and circulated within texts and representations, which in turn function to produce a particular understanding or knowledge about the world that is accepted as ‘truth’” (Foucault, 1980, as cited in Waitt, 2005, p. 168). Discourse analysis seeks to investigate constructions of truth and knowledge that regulate thoughts and behaviours, along with the mechanisms that maintain and legitimize these constructions (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). These mechanisms are referred to as discursive structures, “the unwritten conventions that operate to produce some kind of authoritative account of the world” (Waitt, 2005, p. 168). It is important to note the temporal element of these discursive structures: “Discursive structures set limits to

how people can think and act at a specific historical conjuncture” and so “meanings are temporally ‘fixed’ only to achieve a particular purpose within a specific historical context” (Waitt, 2005, p. 172). Therefore, discourses (along with the meanings and practices they legitimize and reinforce) are not definitively fixed or permanent. Instead, they differ greatly from one period to the next (Waitt, 2005). Citing the work of Foucault (1972) and Nietzsche (1998), Hannam and Knox (2005) explain that these “genealogies” of discursive formations are important to consider to “reveal the workings of power and the sometimes subtle shifting of meanings over time” (p. 27). This also brings attention to the social context; while investigating particular claims to truth and the discursive structures through which they are constructed and legitimized, it is imperative to pay close attention to both the details of text and to the social context. This is because discourse operates in a specific social circumstance (Parker, 2004). Discourse analysis, then, “seeks to develop a nuanced reading that unpacks in minute detail a particular text in the cultural context in which it is embedded” (Hannam & Knox, 2005, pp. 27-8).

Foucauldian discourse analysis takes a particular position on the nature of truth and reality, which stems from its conceptualization of discourse and its productive force. Discourses “produce the specific semantics of the words in use, and they relate words to objects and to strategies of acting towards and thinking about things, persons etc.” (Diaz-Bone et al., 2008, p. 11). In this way, discourses participate in shaping the nature of being of things in the world, they “produce a perception and representation of social reality” (Diaz-Bone et al., 2008, p. 11). However, these discourses are not as complete or coherent as they may appear: “incomplete, ambiguous, and contradictory discourses” have the power “to produce a social reality that we experience as solid and real” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, pp. 1-2). Consequently, most discourse

analysis rejects that subjects and objects of which discourse speaks exist outside or independently of discourse (Fairclough, 1995). Given this, discourse analysts are not concerned with revealing the “truth” or the true nature of reality. Instead, they try to understand how texts are used to construct and re-present particular versions of reality.

3.1.2 Dimensions of Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis can be separated into two analytical processes, discourse analysis I and discourse analysis II. Discourse analysis I is concerned with the activity of reading a text and making an understanding of it in a particular context (O’Halloran, 2003). This can include “how the values of the reader, the reader context and so on affect the reading of the text in the production of coherence” (O’Halloran, 2003, p. 12). As a methodology, discourse analysis I generally involves the interpretation of a wide range of visual and written materials (Rose, 2007). Rose (2007) points out that discourse analysis I is very useful in unpacking the details of textual materials and interpreting their effects, “especially in relation to constructions of social difference” (p. 171). However, it fails to consider the practices and social institutions that produce, circulate, and reinforce certain constructions of truth or knowledge (Rose, 2007). Discourse analysis II, on the other hand, pays careful attention to the institutions and social contexts in which discourses are embedded and re-produced. Also known as Foucauldian discourse analysis, it is concerned with the ways knowledge is organized, talked about and acted upon in different institutions (O’Halloran, 2003). Unlike discourse analysis I, discourse analysis II is very useful in examining how the dominant discourses of various institutions construct social reality, including objects, subjects, relations, and so on (Rose, 2007). However, it overlooks “the

site of the image itself, and[...]seems uninterested in the complexities and contradictions of discourse” (Rose, 2007, p. 195).

Although these distinctions have been made in the literature, many works do not identify their analyses as either I or II, referring instead to “discourse analysis” generally or to “Foucauldian discourse analysis” more specifically. This can be the point of some confusion or ambiguity when attempting to distinguish the methodological approach used in these studies. Rose (2007) suggests that discourse analysis I and discourse analysis II reflect two distinct emphases in Foucault’s work. Some authors, however, only (and specifically) identify discourse analysis II as Foucauldian discourse analysis, implying that discourse analysis I does not directly reflect Foucault’s work. By contrast, it appears that some authors, when referring to Foucauldian discourse analysis, are concerned with both discourse I and discourse II, in effect performing both discourse analyses I and II without making a distinction between the two. For example, Waitt (2005) seems to consider various dimensions of discourse and capture both analytical processes I and II in his discussion of Foucauldian discourse analysis:

the priority of discourse analysis is upon the *effects* of a particular cultural text on what an individual may do or think by unravelling its production, social context, and intended audience. The methodological strength of discourse analysis lies in its ability to move beyond the text, the subtext, and representation to uncover issues of power relationships that inform what people think and do. (original emphasis, p. 166)

According to Rose (2007), this is not unusual; she notes that it is not difficult to find work that investigates visual images, verbal texts, institutions and social practices together. While to me it seems wise to leave it to the discourse analyst to decide which analytical process is most

appropriate for her or his study, as well as what name to identify it by, it also seems beneficial to adopt a combined lens of discourse analysis I and discourse analysis II. Considering their individual strengths and weaknesses, performing both seems to offer a more coherent and comprehensive interpretation of a text through a focus on the details of the textual material, the discourses it re-produces, as well as the cultural context and social institutions of which the text and its discourses are a part.

3.1.3 Discourse Analysis and Critical Studies

Considering that “[s]ocial inequity is discursively constituted, reproduced and legitimated” (Toolan, 1997, p. 87), discourse analysis is a promising tool for advancing the consideration of issues of social justice. Discourse analysis, as a theory and method, can contribute to the advancement of research of a distinct political nature, such as that research which aims to expose and examine the marginalization or oppression of specific groups of people or other-than-human animals in society. Politically, discourse analysts

Deplor[e] sexism, racism, discrimination, classism, homophobia, enforced privilege of any kind, domination, marginalization and exclusion, the uses of power to create and sustain multiple kinds of wealth and multiple kinds of poverty. Relatedly, they are in favour of a better world, one of equity, justice, liberation and true democracy. And they are professionally interested in how a range of discourses keeps us in the worse world rather than the better. (Toolan, 1997, p. 100)

The potential contribution of discourse analysis to a political agenda or a kind of advocacy stems not only from its investigation of power relations and dominant discourses and their effects, but also from its concern for alternative discourses and their *potential* effects (Hannam & Knox,

2005). Importantly, discourse analysis pays careful attention to discourses that “fail to exert the same power over particular realms of practice” as dominant discourses (Hannam & Knox, 2005, p. 28). This speaks to the productive power of discourse identified by Foucault. As previously mentioned, discourse constructs that of which it speaks. Thus, while “certain discourses will use a word in such a way that it becomes the dominant connotation”, “other discourses may use it in a subordinate or even subversive manner” (Hannam & Knox, 2005, p. 27). Using a critical perspective, discourse analysts can become aware of alternative discourses and bring an emphasis to other ways of knowing that may contradict the dominant discourses; other ways of knowing that produce alternative meanings and social practices.

This potential of discourse analysis to contribute to critical studies in any field stems from taking notice of inconsistencies within the texts; these incoherencies may illuminate alternative or contradicting discourses. Sometimes, however, alternative discourses may be subtler than this, noticeable only through their absences (Rose, 2007). To ensure that not only dominant discourses are noticed, discourse analysis involves an alert attentiveness to the exclusions or silences in the text. As Rose (2007) notes, “Absences can be as productive as explicit naming; *invisibility* can have just as powerful effects as visibility” (original emphasis, p. 165). Therefore, it is important to look beyond what is within the text at what has been left out or is not obvious (Hannam & Knox, 2005). Furthermore, discourse analysis examines the mechanisms that enable these exclusions, the mechanisms that subvert or silence other voices and other ways of knowing. By doing so, it can contribute to our understanding of the oppressive structures of society that uphold various oppressions and dominations. It is unsurprising, then, that discourse

analysis and the conceptualization of discourse on which it is established have been used by other critical theorists in their investigations of social issues:

It is this aspect of discourse as a mediator and tool of power through the production of knowledge that gender or queer (e.g. Butler) and postcolonial theorists (e.g. Said and Spivak) have explored when engaging with Foucault's concept of discourse. (Diaz-Bone et al., 2008, p. 11)

Discourse analysis seems particularly applicable to and appropriate in today's society given that there is clearly no shortage of issues of social justice. Toolan (1997), however, argues that discourse analysis is most useful when it is applied to certain problems or contexts. He maintains that there are many easily retrievable examples of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression in our society. As such, discourse analysis "should focus on the subtler and hence more insidious discriminatory and exclusionary discourses that abound" (Toolan, 1997, p. 94). He suggests that instead of addressing the "many easily retrievable examples" of oppression, discourse analysis should examine "something more politically complex and controversial than such self-evidently undesirable phenomena as racist discourse" (p. 100). Although his suggestion that discourse analysts investigate complex issues through detailed and historically situated accounts of discourses is useful, I question what politics are not complex and what marginalizations and forms of domination are not multiple, overlapping and intimately intertwined. Considering the deep-rooted and mutually reinforcing natures of various forms of oppression, it seems to me that no social issue is undeserving of the critical perspective of a discourse analyst, however pedestrian or uncomplicated it may at first appear.

3.1.4 Discourse Analysis and the Interpretation of Visual Images

The materials with which discourse analysts work are most often actual instances of discourse, referred to as texts (Johnstone, 2002). These may be written texts, visual representations and practices, all of which are appropriate sources for discourse analysis (Waitt, 2005). Texts are not created in isolation but in direct relation to one another; “the meanings of any one discursive image or text depend not only on that one text or image, but also on the meanings carried by other images and texts” (Rose, 2007, p. 142). As Phillips and Hardy (2002) explain, discourses are not neatly packaged in a particular text or a cluster of texts. Although “researchers can only trace clues to [discourses] regardless of how much data they collect” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 74), using a variety of sources is beneficial.

Although a variety of sources may exist, the examination of visual representations or images is increasingly relevant in today’s “visually saturated” and “ocularcentric” culture (Spencer, 2011, p. 11). Images can be rich sources for discourse analysis, as they reflect the dominant, socially constructed ideologies that circulate power in society:

the visual evidence of photographs or video is only a partial representation of the reality which we perceive, a reality which is intimately linked to social values and culture, a reality which is collectively constructed. The meaning of the image[...]is a construction of culture both in its production and interpretation. (Spencer, 2011, p. 13)

Thus texts such as visual images are not produced in a contextual vacuum (Mitchell, 2011).

Although a visual image may seem benign or neutral in nature, it is always political, whether this is done intentionally or “through the embedded discourses and conventional codes which constitute and articulate meaning in our social institutions” (Spencer, 2011, p. 16). Visual

representations, like other kinds of texts, construct reality and serve to regulate or discipline thought and behaviour. They are deeply embedded in and re-created by a particular context and a complex web of power relations: “A photograph does not show how things look. It is an image produced by a mechanical device, at a very specific moment, in a particular context by a person working within a set of personal parameters” (Prosser, 2006, p. 2). As a result, exposing how and to what extent dominant discourses and discursive formations privilege particular knowledge over other knowledge often has important political implications (Waitt, 2005). In the case of the tourism industry, certain voices are often excluded or silenced to produce and circulate a particular kind of knowledge. In doing so, the industry, along with the tourist representations it produces, serves to exclude the consideration of other knowledges, especially if these challenge or are inconsistent with the dominant discourses (Waitt, 2005). However, (and to some surprise), Rose (2007) reports that relatively few studies have investigated the workings of discourse in visual representation: “Very little attention is paid either to the ways of seeing brought to particular images by specific audiences, or to the social institutions and practices through which images are made and displayed” (p. 141).

Herein lies the relevance and potential usefulness of Foucauldian discourse analysis to the intentions of this research study. In analyzing visual images, discourse analysis can explore how images construct particular perspectives of the world. Paying attention to the image itself, discourse analysis has the potential of unpacking how various powerful institutions have put these images to work (Rose, 2007). A thorough investigation and account of powerful discourses and the social institutions through which they are re-created can expose structures of oppression, domination, and marginalization. It can also bring to the forefront alternative

discourses that challenge or contradict discursive norms. Discourse analysis can draw on texts that encompass and communicate an alternative or subversive discourse, looking at the processes of construction, meaning making, and community action (Hodgetts, Chamberlain, & Groot, 2011). This is not a simple task; I recognize the complexity of systems of oppression and their interwoven, mutually reinforcing discourses. Even so, I am hopeful that the potential of discourse analysis can be channelled to critically confront mechanisms that silence and illuminate other ways of knowing and constructing our social realities and, in particular, our relationships with other animals.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

3.2.1 Tourism Promotional Materials as Sources for Discourse Analysis

The intent of this research study is to critically investigate polar bear tourism promotional materials pertaining to one particular field setting—Churchill, Manitoba, the self-proclaimed “polar bear capital of the world.” I relied on three “kinds” of texts: Firstly, I examined the websites of tour operators offering polar bear related tours or tourism activities in Churchill. I identified 17 tour operators through a search of Churchill’s official “Town of Churchill” website as well as the “Everything Churchill” website operated by Travel Manitoba, in addition to a general internet search for tour operators offering polar bear related tours in Churchill. Table 1 presents these 17 tour operators along with a brief overview of their programs and activities. I would like to briefly highlight the diversity among the tour operators: For example, not all of the companies examined in this study operate (or host) tours themselves in Churchill. A number of them (refer to Table 1 for details) package the various elements of the Churchill experience (such as accommodations and polar bear viewing tours) for the customer, but are not involved in

Tourism Company	Polar Bear Viewing Tourism Related Activities/Operations in Churchill	
<p>These companies have a physical presence in the town of Churchill and operate/oversee tourism activities on the ground.</p>	<p>Churchill Northern Studies Centre</p>	<p>The Centre is an independent, non-profit research and education facility located in Churchill that provides accommodations, meals, transportation, and tourism programs to tourists. It offers a variety of “learning vacations” including the “Lords of the Arctic: The ecology of Hudson Bay’s polar bears” program. The Centre does not own/operate tundra vehicles, and arranges tundra excursions primarily through Tundra Buggy® Adventure. An instructor associated with the Centre accompanies guests on tours.</p>
	<p>Churchill Wild</p>	<p>Company owns and operates four remote fly-in lodges in Northern Manitoba, located from 30km to 250km from Churchill. Churchill Wild specializes in ground-level walking tours to view polar bears. One tourism program offered by the company involves a stay at a “remote lodge” followed by a polar bear viewing tour through Tundra Buggy® Adventure.</p>
	<p>Frontiers North Adventures</p>	<p>Company is located in Churchill and owns the Tundra Buggy® Adventure, offering polar bear viewing tours aboard tundra vehicles (Tundra Buggies) in the Churchill Wildlife Management Area. The company also operates the Tundra Buggy Lodge, a mobile lodge located in the Churchill Wildlife Management Area that is relocated to Cape Churchill in Wapusk National Park in November. The company charters its Tundra Buggies to other companies, such as the Churchill Northern Studies Centre and Churchill Wild.</p>
	<p>Great White Bear Tours</p>	<p>Company is located in Churchill. It operates the Great White Bear Tours Gift Shop and offers polar bear tours aboard tundra vehicles (Polar Rovers) in the Churchill Wildlife Management Area. The company operates the Tundra Lodge, a mobile lodge located near the coast of Hudson Bay in the Churchill Wildlife Management Area in which tourists can stay overnight. Great White Bear Tours operates all ground tours for clients of Natural Habitat Adventures.</p>
	<p>Hudson Bay Helicopters</p>	<p>Located in Churchill, the company offers helicopter tours in and around the Churchill area.</p>
	<p>Lazy Bear Lodge</p>	<p>Company is located in Churchill and operates the Lazy Bear Lodge and Lazy Bear Café. Company offers polar bear viewing tours aboard tundra vehicles in coastal areas near Churchill. Lazy Bear Lodge does not have a permit to operate tours in the Churchill Wildlife Management Area or Wapusk National Park, and so cannot take tourists as far east as Tundra Buggy Adventure and Great White Bear Tours.</p>
	<p>Nature 1st Tours and Transportation</p>	<p>Located in Churchill, the company provides tours of the town of Churchill and its surrounding areas through ground-level walking excursions (primarily in summer months) and vehicle tours (aboard van or bus). The company does not have a permit to operate in the protected areas east of Churchill.</p>
	<p>Sea North Tours</p>	<p>Located in Churchill, the company specializes in river tours. Although polar bear viewing is not the focus of the company’s programs, the opportunity to view polar bears is highlighted.</p>

	Wat'chee Expeditions	The company owns and operates Wat'chee Lodge located 40 miles south of Churchill. With a permit from Parks Canada, the company offers excursions into the polar bear denning areas in Wapusk National Park.
These companies amalgamate travel products to create tour itineraries. Company representatives escort/host the tours.	Churchill Nature Tours	Headquarters located in Erickson, Manitoba. Company designs tour packages including arrangements for lodging, food, all transportation, etc. Guests are accompanied by a Churchill Nature Tours guide.
	Natural Habitat Adventures	Headquarters located in Colorado, US. Company creates tour packages and makes all related arrangements for clients. Natural Habitat Adventures books polar bear viewing excursions (aboard Tundra Rovers) exclusively with Great White Bear Tours. Guests are accompanied by a Natural Habitat Adventures guide.
	Cregor Adventures	These companies amalgamate travel products (including all transportation, accommodation, food, tours, etc.) into tour itineraries, but do not escort/host the tours themselves. Most polar bear tourism related itineraries involve an excursion aboard a tundra vehicle and/or a stay at a mobile tundra lodge.
	Great Canadian Travel Company	
	Heartland International Travel and Tours	
	Kensington Tours	
	responsibletravel.com	
	Tours of Exploration	

Table 1. Polar bear tourism related activities/operations of 17 tourism companies analyzed in this study. Note: The purpose of this table is not to provide a detailed description of the tourism products offered by each tourism company, but rather to communicate some particularities with regard to the companies' specializations and operations. It is also important to note that while all of these companies participate in the polar bear viewing industry in some way (hence their inclusion in this analysis), facilitation of encounters between tourists and polar bears is not their singular focus: many of the companies listed in this table emphasize experiences with other animals (such as foxes and ptarmigan) and a diversity of plant-life.

actual tourism operations on the ground. On the other hand, several companies that do have a physical presence in Churchill and that provide guided tours rely on the tundra vehicles and drivers of other tourism companies. The organization and content of Table 1 aim to highlight such distinctions between the tour operators, as well as point out any visible relationships or joint operations.

Despite such diversities among the tour operators, they all engage in the facilitation of the polar bear viewing tourism experience in some capacity. I investigated the content of their websites, including visual images, written elements, and videos. I copied relevant material (or

took screen shots of content I was unable to copy) and inputted these into a separate Word document in which I organized the content by appropriate themes. When analyzing videos, I transcribed the relevant content as well as provided a thick description of the imagery for my records. I also employed this approach to investigate the second kind of text investigated in this study: polar bear tourism related online marketing campaigns of two crown corporations, Travel Manitoba (including the Churchill-specific “Everything Churchill” website operated by Travel Manitoba) and the Canadian Tourism Commission.

Thirdly, I traveled to and stayed in Churchill from October 17 to November 9, 2013 during which time I collected promotional materials such as postcards, souvenirs, and brochures, as well as observed many tourist souvenirs at local gift shops, hotels, restaurants, and the Churchill airport. I recorded my observations and took photographs of souvenirs provided I had permission to do so by the vendor. The purpose of these observations was not to count the numbers of items, but to develop a sense of the types of souvenirs offered and to document these (verbally or visually) for inclusion in later stages of analysis. With the same mindset and intentions, I photographed polar bear tourism related signage in Churchill. Additionally, I examined the websites of the tourism establishments I visited during my stay and in which I collected or observed polar bear tourism related materials. Figure 2 presents these establishments with a brief description of their operations.

I approached the sources identified above through the analytical lens of discourse analysis I. Discourse analysis I demands great attention to the details of the text. Although a text may have a sort of unified or complete presence, it consists of “heterogeneous and contradictory properties” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 99). Following Waitt’s (2005) suggestion, I noted

Type of Tourism Establishment	Name of Tourism Establishment
Restaurant	Churchill Motel Restaurant and Dining Room
	Gypsy's Bakery and Restaurant
	Lazy Bear Café
	Reef Restaurant and Dining Room
	Tundra Inn Dining Room & Pub
Gift/Souvenir Shop	Arctic Trading Company
	Eskimo Museum Gift Shop
	Here Be Bears!
	Northern Images
	Tundra Buggy Gift Shop
	Great White Bear Gift Shop
	Wapusk General Store
Hotel	Aurora Inn
	Bear Country Inn
	Churchill Motel
	Iceberg Inn
	Lazy Bear Lodge
	Polar Inn & Suites
	Seaport Hotel
	The Tundra Inn

Table 2. *Tourism establishments included in this study.*

such things as the arrangement of the elements in the image, considering the manner in which these elements were chosen and how they were combined in a particular image. These elements form patterns that reveal the discursive structures (i.e., rule-bound ideas or statements that discipline our thoughts and behaviours) of the image (Waitt, 2005), discursive structures that legitimize a particular knowledge about polar bears and human-polar bear relations. Throughout this analysis, I followed very closely the strategies suggested by Waitt (2005, pp. 180-185) to analyze the texts:

- (1) Familiarization: I absorbed myself in my texts. This allowed me to identify key themes and examine relationships between statements, groups of statements, and different texts.
- (2) Coding: I devised coding categories based on my research questions, focusing primarily on the “constructions of truth” about polar bears and human-polar bear relationships, and on the “privileged discourses” that circulate in the texts and in which the texts are

embedded that work to maintain and legitimize the aforementioned constructions.

Designing the two initial coding categories to closely reflect the research questions was important because the categories needed to be analytically significant to my discourse analysis. The themes within each category, however, arose entirely from the data through the conscientious identification and interpretation of manifest and latent meanings and themes.

- (3) Persuasion: I investigated the texts for “effects of truth” to explore how particular meanings of polar bears and human-polar bear interactions are produced and normalized (or accepted as knowledge). This involved attuning myself to the workings of the privileged discourses that construct and maintain particular realities of polar bears and human-polar bear interactions.
- (4) Incoherence: I took notice of inconsistencies within the texts.
- (5) Exclusions and silences: I tried to attune myself to alternative constructions of polar bears and marginalized discourses from which they stem, actively looking for exclusions and silences within the texts.
- (6) Finally, I focused on the details of each text (i.e., details of the promotional materials), while paying careful attention to the discursive practices of institutions (such as tourism, science, etc.) in which the texts are embedded. This more closely reflects the analytical lens of discourse analysis II, which I discuss in more detail below.

3.2.2 Examining Broader Discourses and Creating “Dense Context”

As previously stated, it is critical to pay attention to the social context and to examine the institutional practices that might generate a certain type of text (rather than focus solely on the text itself) (Waitt, 2005). Doing so allows the analyst to identify the mechanisms that legitimize particular versions of reality (Waitt, 2005). The content of visual images is only one component of data in visual research; the images are inevitably context specific (Mitchell, 2011). Although an image may appear impartial in nature, it has important political implications (Waitt, 2005). While discourse analysis I allowed me to scrutinize the details of the texts, I employed discourse analysis II to more directly investigate the issues of power, regimes of truth, and social institutions of which the images are a product. To do this, I aimed to provide “dense context” which is similar to the idea of thick description. Edwards (2003) explains it as “a dynamic and dialogical shape of broader discourses which constitute the whole cultural theatre of which the photographs are part” (p. 262). Discourse analysis II involved “opening up” the investigation of the texts through a much more complex and nuanced reading of “dense context” (Edwards, 2003, p. 275).

Thus, I focused my attention on both the details of the texts as well as the socio-cultural context within which these texts are embedded. This was essential to my intention to examine how discourses are constituted and circulated within promotional materials, and how these in turn function to produce particular understandings or knowledges about polar bears that are accepted as truth. I paid careful attention to a variety of possible discourses operating within the social context of polar bear tourism in Churchill (especially those discourses that intersect the

concepts and issues of gender and species). While some of these discourses were apparent in the promotional materials, others were working more implicitly; conscious awareness of the latent meanings and themes within the materials was particularly helpful in this regard.

This attunement to the discourses functioning within the texts and the socio-cultural space more broadly was enriched by my immersion in the history of the town of Churchill and the development of its tourism industry. I consulted books, videos, news clips, documentaries, etc. related to polar bears, tourism, and polar bear viewing tourism in Churchill. I also consulted sources that are not tourism-specific, such as those exploring the history and development of the town of Churchill and its various industries. Furthermore, I familiarized myself with the website and policy documents of the Churchill Wildlife Management Area (managed by Manitoba Conservation, a branch of the Manitoba government), as most polar bear viewing tourism in and around the town of Churchill occurs within this designated area. I paid particular attention to the policy language relating to polar bear tourism. I also honed my awareness of the workings of other organizations or influential groups (such as Polar Bears International), as well as non-tourism media campaigns (such as Coca-Cola's use of polar bears in advertisements). While these institutions or organizations are not directly related to tourism, they participate in co-constructing the meanings and realities of polar bears.

I would like to reiterate that these elements were approached through the perspective of discourse analysis II: they were not scrutinized in the same way as the promotional materials I analyzed through the lens of discourse analysis I (i.e., the websites of tour operators, tourism establishments, and Crown corporations Travel Manitoba and Canadian Tourism Commission, and the promotional materials obtained or observed on site). Instead, the materials discussed

above were approached through a more open, flexible, and creative investigation with the primary purpose of cultivating insight into the context within which the promotional materials and discourses of tourism are embedded.

3.2.3 Embedded Methodology and Reflexive Practice

In his discussion of Foucauldian discourse analysis, Waitt (2005) notes that “Foucault’s request to attempt to suspend yourself when approaching your analysis from everything you have experienced or learnt is an impossible task” (p. 180). Despite this criticism, Waitt advises the discourse analyst to “suspend pre-existing categories” and “examine[...][his/her] texts with fresh eyes and ears” (p. 180). He emphasizes, however, that this must happen alongside a reflexive discussion of “how you are embedded into the research project” (p. 180). This reflects a departure from positivistic/scientific modes of inquiry that value distance and boundary between the objective, rational researcher and “the researched,” toward interpretive research methodologies in which the subjectivities of the researcher are acknowledged and explored, even embraced. A need for such approaches to tourism research has been identified and articulated in the literature. Drawing on the work of Veijola and Jokinen (1994), for example, Jamal, Camargo and Wilson (2013) note “a lack of the subjective, emotional and personal voice in tourism research”, “with researchers remaining as nameless and genderless” (p. 4603). It is important to consider how research may benefit from critical self-reflection on, and thoughtful expression of, the researcher’s emotional experiences. Ali (2012) insists that “[t]he importance of recognizing and writing about emotions is central to producing rich text on researcher experiences in the field” (p. 16) and that it is also “central to developing reflexive practice in post-positivistic research” (p. 16). The process of reflexivity, therefore, can help the researcher

interpret his or her emotional experiences in a research setting, facilitating a reflexive discussion of one's own embeddedness and relational position in the study.

An interpretive approach, nourished by reflexive thinking, is compatible with ecofeminist philosophy which largely affirms Haraway's concept of "situated and embodied knowledges" (1988, p. 583):

only partial perspective promises objective vision. All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see. (1988, p. 583)

The perspective of the researcher is partial and limited, grounded in context, location, and circumstance. An ecofeminist orientation, therefore, affirms the values of particularized, situational inquiries and responses rather than abstract, universalizable judgments or claims to knowledge that overlook the personal, contextual, emotional, and political elements of ethical issues (Donovan, 1996). In this endeavour, the subjectivities and embeddedness of the researcher are acknowledged in such a way as to dispel the dichotomous "subject/object" relationship (among other dualisms like reason/emotion), as "[t]he researcher, along with her perception of the situation and system being studied, becomes part of what is studied" (Wells & Wirth, 1997, p. 306).

Holding these ideas in mind, I was inspired by Reis' (2012, p. 322) "reflexive and creative" approach to study the experiences of trampers (i.e., hikers) on Stewart Island, New Zealand. As part of her "interpretive and embedded methodology" (abstract), Reis "chose to engage with,

and analyse, trampers' practices and narratives about human-nature relationships" by embedding herself "within these practices and narratives" as both a "researcher and trumper" (p. 312). Reis' own tramping experiences, therefore, informed her analysis of the experiences of other trampers on Stewart Island. Adopting Reis' approach and insights, I tried to thoughtfully embed myself into the late-fall (i.e., high season) tourist experience in Churchill as a researcher and tourist. During my three and a half week visit to Churchill in October and November of 2013, I tried to engage in a variety of tourist activities: I went on two polar bear viewing tours operated by different companies, one excursion in the coastal area near the town of Churchill, and another further east in the Churchill Wildlife Management Area. Both tours were day-long and occurred aboard tundra vehicles. To increase my mobility I rented a vehicle for the duration of my stay, exploring roads and places that I was cautioned against reaching by foot for reasons of safety: Cape Merry National Historic Site of Canada, Churchill Rocket Research Range National Historic Site of Canada, Marina and Observation Tower south of Churchill, Miss Piggy (a downed plane that crashed close to town in 1979), and MV Ithaca (a freighter that ran aground in 1961 near the shore of Hudson Bay), among others. I spent much time in the town itself, enjoying meals at local restaurants, perusing, admiring, and purchasing souvenirs at local gift shops, and walking along streets and through neighbourhoods. Staying at the Churchill Northern Studies Centre allowed me to attend numerous lectures and presentations arranged by the CNSC for various tourist groups, led by CNSC staff or guest researchers. I enjoyed meals in the CNSC cafeteria on a daily basis alongside other tourists and CNSC employees and volunteers. Many of these experiences involved organic (i.e., naturally-occurring) and engaging conversations with the people I encountered on a variety of topics, such as our personal experiences in and

impressions of Churchill, and what drew us to this special place. Often, conversations with other tourists involved fascinated accounts of recent encounters with other animals (and an enthusiastic sharing of photographs).

Throughout this research (and tourist) experience, I maintained a personal research journal in which I wrote about my encounters and conversations with other people, emotional and personal experiences, reflections on past events, and anything else that seemed relevant. While initially this journal helped me to document events, thoughts, and feelings, it later helped me to engage in a critical reflection of my research, and to think reflexively about my researcher/tourist subjectivity in the context of this study and how these positions influence my work. Recognizing my embeddedness in the research, I allowed my experiences in Churchill to inform my analysis of the discourses of polar bear tourism, engaging with and weaving in my personal insights into both the production and consumption of polar bear viewing experiences. In crafting this research project, I have tried to engage my personal voice and express my reflections honestly, thoughtfully, and critically. While I do this in hopes of reflexively discussing my embeddedness (both deliberate, as a part of my methodology, and unintentional) into this study, I am also reminding the reader that this discourse analysis and its language constitute *an* interpretation (Rose, 2007) and represent my partial and limited perspective. Rather than revealing a “truth” or *the* reality, I hope to offer a critical interpretation of how particular versions of reality are co-constructed by the discourses of polar bear tourism.

3.3 Structure of Thesis

I have organized this analysis into three sections: Chapter 4 titled “Constructions of Truth” addresses the research question “What construction(s) of truth in relation to polar bears

does tourism privilege?”, identifying the dominant portrayals of polar bears and drawing on direct examples of the tourism materials analyzed to help elucidate these portrayals. Chapter 5, “Privileged Discourses”, then addresses how the constructions of polar bears identified in Chapter 4 are produced, favoured, and accepted as knowledge, exploring the dominant discourses that work to maintain or legitimize these various meanings of polar bears. Chapter 6 titled “Social Effects” explores the question “How are social inequality, power abuse, and domination of polar bears reproduced or resisted in discourses of polar bear tourism?” In this chapter of the analysis I draw on ecofeminist theory (along with literature from other areas) to explore these issues, paying particular attention to the gendered aspect of the exploitation of polar bears. Chapter 6 is followed by concluding remarks.

This study did not require ethics clearance from the University of Waterloo’s Office of Research Ethics because no human or other-than-human animal participants were directly involved in the project. As previously discussed, the key sources for this discourse analysis were various tourism promotional materials and my researcher and tourist experiences in Churchill. Many of the materials analyzed and subsequently cited in this paper are protected by copyright. Letters of copyright permission were not required, however, as my use and recreation of these materials qualifies under the fair dealing exception in Canadian copyright law. This exception permits the use of copyrighted work for purposes such as research and criticism or review (Geist, 2013), which apply to this project. All promotional materials (i.e., texts) cited in this analysis are accompanied by a complete reference. These are indicated by a number in superscript format (example) at the end of each citation. The details of the references are provided in a section titled “Notes” following the final chapter of this thesis.

3.4 Context of Study: Churchill, Manitoba, Canada

The town of Churchill is located on the Western Coast of Hudson Bay at the mouth of the Churchill River. Positioned along Manitoba's coastline and at latitude 59 degrees north, the town enjoys a subarctic climate and is surrounded by three distinct eco-zones: arctic marine, arctic tundra, and boreal forest (Lemelin, 2008). This intersection makes Churchill home to a diversity of animal and plant life, including beluga whales, arctic foxes, caribou, snowy owls, polar bears, and over 500 species of arctic wildflowers and boreal plants (CNSC, 2013). The Western shores of Hudson Bay are characterized by flat terrain that is dominated by wetland habitats and poorly drained soils (Brandson, 2012). Hudson Bay has low salinity values for ocean water, the landlocked sea receiving a large volume of freshwater from rivers entering the ocean from around the Bay (Brandson, 2012). The Bay's seasonal ice cover begins to form in November and breaks up around June, although the last ice does not completely disappear from the Bay until August (Brandson, 2012).

The town of Churchill has a population of approximately 813 people (Statistics Canada, 2012). According to the National Household Survey conducted by Statistics Canada (2013), 54.1 percent of the population is of non-Aboriginal identity, while 28.8 percent are First Nations (North American Indian), 11.2 percent are Métis, and 4.1 percent are Inuit. The Hudson Bay Lowlands have been home to distinct Aboriginal societies for thousands of years, including the *Palaeo-Eskimos* (dating as far back as 1700 B.C.); the *Thule* people (ancestors to the Inuit); the *Caribou Inuit* from the western Hudson Bay region[;] the *Chipewyan* people, a subarctic Dene culture from the west; the *Swampy Cree*, a Hudson Bay Lowland people

from the southeast; and the *Métis* people of mixed white and native ancestry, primarily Cree and Dene. (original emphasis, Brandson, 2012, p. 13)

Aboriginal inhabitants of the Churchill region relied on animals such as seals, whales, caribou, ptarmigan, and waterfowl for survival (Brandson, 2012). The dynamics of everyday life, however, changed considerably with the establishment of the fur trade post at Churchill by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1717. This British company believed that building and developing a post at Churchill would increase its scope of trade and profit, opening the doors for new trading opportunities with Northern Aboriginal communities and enabling northern exploration (Brandson, 2012). The post was completed in 1718 and named the *Prince of Wales Fort*. This trading post traded primarily "with the Dene (Chipewyan) peoples, Inuit from the northwest coast of Hudson Bay, and the Cree living north of the Nelson River" (Parks Canada, 2011). Aboriginal occupants of these areas were essential to the success of the fur trade throughout its history, having "served as guides and couriers, trappers, provisioners and consumers" (Parks Canada, 2011).

With time the fur trade business diminished at the post, replaced by new major developments in the area. Churchill became home to the Port of Churchill—Canada's only Arctic seaport—in 1931 (Port of Churchill, n.d.). Originally owned by the Government of Canada, the port was sold in 1997 and is now under the ownership of an American company called OmniTRAX. The port is connected to the Hudson Bay Railway (also owned and operated by OmniTRAX), which found its northern terminus in the town of Churchill in 1929 (Brandson, 2012). To this day, access to both rail and sea makes Churchill an active hub for the transportation of grain and other commodities to and from domestic and international markets

(Port of Churchill, n.d.). While the port provides employment for a number of Churchill residents, the town also has a modern health centre to service the local community. According to the National Household Survey (Statistics Canada, 2013), 28.3 percent of the labour force population is employed in transportation and warehousing; 26.3 percent in health care and social assistance; 10.1 percent in retail trade; 7 percent in public administration; 4 percent in educational services; 4 percent in administrative and support, waste management and remediation services; and 2 percent in arts, entertainment and recreation.

Tourism is a significant contributor to the local economy (although its presence in the above numbers is difficult to discern because tourism is not recognized as a distinct business category by the North American Industry Classification System). Tourists travel to Churchill for a



Figure 1. Sign welcoming people into the town of Churchill. Photographed by Olga Yudina.

number of reasons (Figure 1), and likely among the top are to view polar bears (primarily in October and November), beluga whales (primarily in June and July), a variety of birds, and the aurora borealis (northern lights). The polar bear viewing industry has experienced rapid growth since the 1980s, this booming period beginning with the development of tundra vehicles and mobile tundra lodges to increase the industry's (and its clients') accessibility to polar bears (Lemelin & Wiersma, 2007a). Lemelin and Wiersma (2007a) suggest that "conservative estimates place the number of visits between 2100 and 3000 annually" and posit that since "each visitor takes an average of two to three polar bear viewing outings per trip, then outings per individual increases significantly to approximately 6300-9000 annually" (p. 41).

The viewing of polar bears occurs primarily aboard tundra vehicles (Figures 2 and 3) that take tourists from the town of Churchill eastward into the Churchill Wildlife Management Area (CWMA) (Figure 4 presents a map of Churchill and surrounding areas). The CWMA is managed by the Manitoba government (Manitoba Conservation) and was established to protect "the polar bear's summer resting areas and maternity denning grounds, where the white bears are born" (Manitoba Conservation, n.d.,



Figure 2. Tundra vehicle (called Tundra Buggy) operated by Frontiers North Adventures (owner of the Tundra Buggy Adventure) by permit in the Churchill Wildlife Management Area and Wapusk National Park. Source: Frontiers North Adventures, 2014, photograph by Robert R. Taylor.¹



Figure 3. Tundra vehicle (called Tundra Rover) operated by Great White Bear Tours by permit in the Churchill Wildlife Management Area. Source: Great White Bear Tours, 2014.²

“Watchable wildlife”). Two tour operators have permits to operate tundra vehicles within this protected area: Tundra Buggy Adventure (owned by Frontiers North Adventures) and Great

White Bear Tours. Each of these companies also operates a mobile tundra lodge in the CWMA.

Frontiers North Adventures is the only company that has a permit to also operate a temporary mobile tundra lodge at Cape Churchill in Wapusk National Park, a protected area established with similar intentions as the CWMA, and managed by the government of Canada (Parks Canada). (Wat’chee Expeditions also has permission to operate polar bear viewing tours in Wapusk National Park, but this occurs approximately 40 miles south of Churchill).

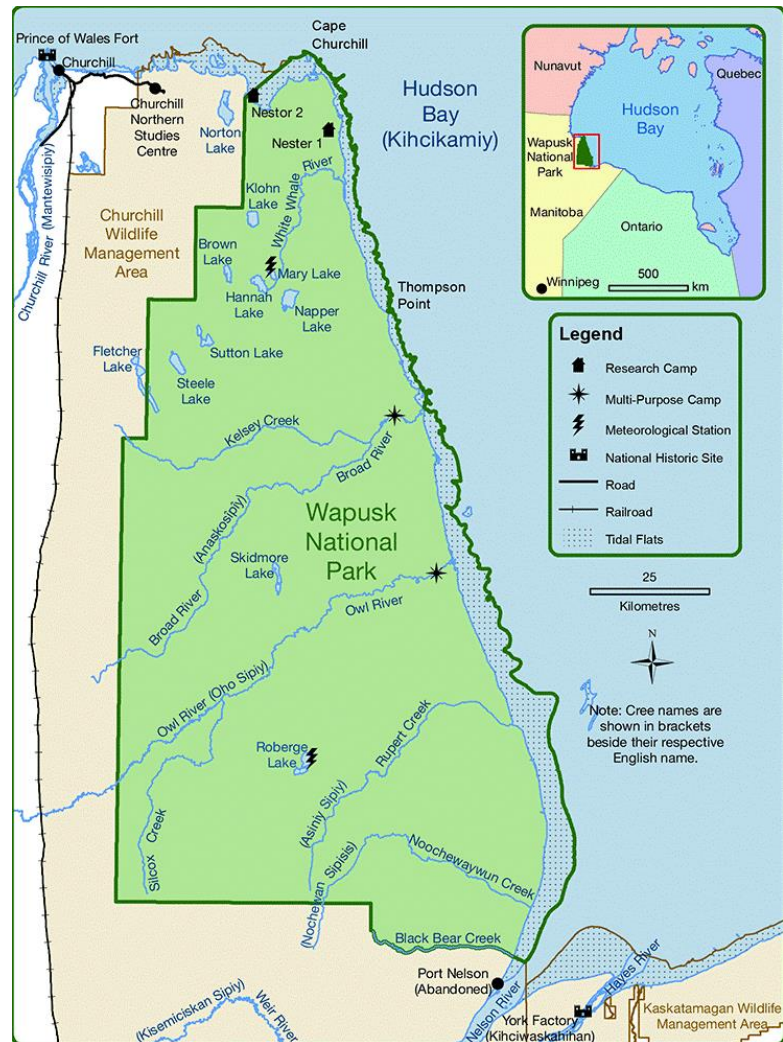


Figure 4. Map of Churchill area (including Churchill Wildlife Management Area and Wapusk National Park). Source: Parks Canada, 2012.³

It is estimated that the Western Hudson Bay population of polar bears is approximately 935 (Derocher, 2012). From late September to November, polar bears migrate from their summer resting areas toward the coast of Hudson Bay, anticipating the formation of (and their

return to) the ice. Most of the bears stay on the ice of Hudson Bay (primarily to hunt ringed seals) from mid-November to mid-July (Manitoba Conservation, n.d., “Polar bear alert program”). They spend the ice-free period (mid-July to mid-November) on the adjacent coastal lands. While human encounters with polar bears can occur at any time of the year, they are most frequent during the bears’ migration to and congregation along the coast in the months of October and November. Earlier break-up and later freeze-up of Hudson Bay resulting from global climate change (Derocher, 2012) could indicate increased frequency of interaction between human beings and polar bears as the bears are forced to spend more time on land.

In an effort to manage encounters between polar bears and residents of Churchill, Manitoba Conservation operates the Polar Bear Alert Program which aims to “minimiz[e] the possibilities of unsafe or unexpected interactions between people and polar bears” (Manitoba Conservation, n.d., “Polar Bear alert program”). As part of this program, polar bears who enter the control zone—an area “around the immediate Churchill townsite and former dump[...]in which polar bears are not allowed”—are moved out of the area, usually with “scaring devices” or by being “immobilized with a dart gun on the site” (Manitoba Conservation, n.d., “Polar bear alert program”). If these tactics are unsuccessful and the bear remains in the control zone, a “live trap” is set for the bear. “[P]roblem bears captured during bear alert season” are transported to and held in a holding compound called the Polar Bear Holding Facility until Hudson Bay freezes, at which point the bears are released onto the ice (Manitoba Conservation, n.d., “Polar bear alert program”). However, Manitoba Conservation insists that the Polar Bear Alert Program does not hinge on the “aggressive handling of bears”; education about polar bear safety is also an important element (Manitoba Conservation, n.d., “Polar bear alert program”). For example, the

program has made an effort to “educate the people of Churchill and visitors about polar bears and how to avoid potentially dangerous situations” by employing initiatives such as annual classroom talks, publication and distribution of materials such as pamphlets and videos, and special events (Manitoba Conservation, n.d., “Polar bear alert program”).

The Western Hudson Bay population of polar bears has declined by approximately 22 percent between 1987 and 2004, possibly as a result of altered sea ice patterns and their effects on the reproductive and survival rates of polar bears (Derocher, 2012, p. 119). Manitoba attempts to protect the polar bears who inhabit its lands through “a robust legislative and policy framework” (Manitoba Conservation, n.d., “Protection of polar bears”). For example, polar bears are listed as protected under *The Wildlife Act* and as threatened under *The Endangered Species Act*, and the province “does not permit the harvesting of polar bears[...]for either recreational or commercial purposes” (Manitoba Conservation, n.d., “Polar bears in Manitoba”). Of particular relevance to the tourism context are *The Resource Tourism Operators Act* which involves “the licensing and regulation of ecotourism operators” “to prevent illegal or substandard facilities and operations”, and *The Polar Bear Protection Act* which “regulate[s] the procurement, holding and export of live Polar Bears” (Manitoba Conservation, n.d., “Polar bears in Manitoba”). Since Manitoba Conservation “must occasionally remove polar bears from Churchill to protect life and property”, *The Polar Bear Protection Act* was created in 2002 to regulate “the removal and placement of polar bears in captive situations” and to “prevent the use of Manitoba polar bears in an unacceptable manner such as by a circus” (Manitoba Conservation, n.d., “Protection of polar bears”). Under this legislation, “orphaned cubs-of-the-year” can be “donated to zoos that meet or exceed the specified facility and husbandry standards” but “prohibits the capture of

polar bears specifically for donation to zoos” (Manitoba Conservation, n.d., “Protection of polar bears”).

These regulations seem particularly important and relevant in light of the creation of the International Polar Bear Conservation Centre (opened on January 23, 2012) and “Journey to Churchill” exhibit (opened on July 3, 2014) at Assiniboine Park Zoo in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The “Journey to Churchill” exhibit features polar bears (along with other species) in three distinct zones: Wapusk Lowlands, Gateway to the Arctic, and Churchill Coast (Assiniboine Park Zoo, 2014, “Journey to Churchill”). In each zone, “visitors[...]experience a variety of landscapes and animal viewing areas” (Assiniboine Park Zoo, 2014, “Journey to Churchill”). Working in conjunction with the exhibit, the International Polar Bear Conservation Centre “is capable of housing and transitioning orphaned polar bear cubs found within the Polar Bear Alert Program Area control zones in northern Manitoba. The largest control zone is the Polar Bear Alert area around Churchill, Manitoba” (Assiniboine Park Zoo, 2014, “Polar bear transition”). According to Assiniboine Park Zoo, “If the cub is deemed to be a candidate for the transition program, it will be transported to the IPBCC, where it will be cared for and transitioned to life in a captive environment” (Assiniboine Park Zoo, 2014, “Polar bear transition”). In October of 2013, for example, an 11-month-old female polar bear supposedly “abandoned” by her mother and “wandering near the airport” was transported to Assiniboine Park Zoo, where she became “a resident of the Journey to Churchill exhibit” (Bender, 2013). This interest in recreating the “Churchill experience” in an entirely contrived setting, and requiring polar bears from the Churchill area to do so, is concerning and raises issues about the removal and use of free-roaming polar bears for predominantly commercial purposes.

In addition to complying with *The Resource Tourism Operators Act*, tourism companies that have a permit to operate in either of the protected areas are expected to follow certain guidelines, such as keeping their tundra vehicles on designated trails as well as not pursuing, harassing, feeding, and/or baiting polar bears (Lemelin, 2008, pp. 100-1). However, as Lemelin (2008) points out, “the CWMA Management Guidelines do not impose restrictions on the number of tourists allowed in the CWMA, or charge user fees” (p. 101). Moreover, he argues that “since a majority of management efforts are dedicated to the Polar Bear Alert Programme, little if any monitoring of the polar bear tourism activities in the CWMA occurs” and “throughout the last two decades, some of the guidelines on bear observation have not been respected or enforced” (p. 101). This raises concern about the conduct of tourism operators and their clients during tours/excursions on the tundra, and leaves human-polar bear interactions (and the individual well-being of the parties involved in these encounters) vulnerable to the potentially harmful influences of largely unregulated tourism activities.

CHAPTER 4: CONSTRUCTIONS OF TRUTH

In this section, I aim to explore the constructions of truth in relation to polar bears that are privileged by the Churchill tourism industry, addressing the question “In what ways does tourism describe, construct, and particularize bears?” in tourism promotional materials. In an effort to do so, I identify and examine eight prominent “themes” or portrayals of polar bears:

Powerful, majestic, and masculine bear

Bear as masculine figure in and of Canadian wilderness

Silly, social polar bear

Inquisitive polar bear

Fascinating, magical, and awe-inspiring polar bear

Female polar bear as figure of motherhood

Polar bear as resource

Polar bear as performer in the tundra spectacle

While this section begins to introduce some of the dominant discourses of polar bear tourism that maintain and normalize the above constructions, the discourses themselves, as well as their social effects, are explored more thoroughly in subsequent chapters. Moreover, alternative constructions and subversive discourses that emerged through this analysis are discussed in Chapter 6: Social Effects.

4.1 Powerful, Majestic and Masculine Bear

One of the prevailing constructions of polar bears is upheld by a discourse of dominance and superiority—more particularly, the dominance and superiority of polar bears over other species living in the tundra environment. This elevated status of polar bears is signified most

often by verbal references to “Lords” and “Kings”: bears are persistently referred to as “Lords of the North” and “Kings of the Arctic” or close variations of these. For example, Natural Habitat Adventures indicates that their lodge “is widely recognized as the most thrilling way to immerse yourself in the wild habitat of the King of the Arctic.”⁴ Similarly, the Great Canadian Travel Company asserts that “[w]itnessing the migration of the ‘King of the Arctic’ is truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience.”⁵ These constructions directly associate polar bears with males and masculine identity as the titles “King” and “Lord” are primarily applied to men and their connotations are very gender-specific. An explicit example of this can be found in the Hudson Bay Helicopters brochure, in which a section titled “Lords of the Arctic” features an image of two polar bears sparring (and so presumably males) followed by the words: “An unforgettable flight across taiga, tundra and boreal forest delivers you into the realm of the polar bear.” References to polar bears as “Great” complement these depictions: “Our tour packages are designed for those who wish to truly experience the amazing Great White Bear in its natural environment at any time of the year” (Great White Bear Tours);⁶ and in another text: “Keep a sharp eye out en route for caribou, seals, wolves and of course the ‘Great Ice Bears’” (Kensington Tours).⁷ The capitalization of these titles reinforces the distinguished and elevated status of polar bears.

Correspondingly, the spaces in which the polar bears are viewed—out in the tundra—are presented as the bears’ rightful territory. Not only is this implied in the proud titles given to the bears, it is also explicitly reinforced by the use of words such as “domain”: “As evening falls, remain in the domain of the polar bear to experience sunset across the snow and ice” (Cregor Adventures);⁸ and “realm”: “There’s no more thorough immersion in the King of the Arctic’s realm than on this most unique of northern adventures” (Natural Habitat Adventures).⁹ To the

same effect, the Great Canadian Travel Company calls one of its Churchill tour programs “Kingdom of the Ice Bear”.¹⁰ Superiority is presented as a part of a natural order and as an inherent trait in the bears.

Through these titles and depictions, the tourism industry elevates polar bears above the other animals living in the same environment, creating and imposing a hierarchy of importance. This hierarchy seems to have little or nothing to do with polar bears as apex predators and instead reflects that polar bears are of greater importance and interest to human beings than are other animals. This hierarchy is especially apparent when polar bears are mentioned alongside other animals: Natural Habitat Adventures explains that on its adventures tourists “may see caribou, arctic fox, arctic hare, ptarmigan and snowy owls, as well as the undisputed lord of the North, the polar bear.”¹¹ In some instances, the hierarchy is enhanced through the de-emphasis of other animals: “Learn to take outstanding photos of the ‘King of the Arctic’ – and other Arctic wildlife – with tips from NHA Expedition Leader and Head Naturalist Eric Rock” (Natural Habitat Adventures).¹² These animals are mentioned as an afterthought and only as an ambiguous mass term—“other Arctic wildlife.”

The depiction of polar bears as superior creatures is detectable even when no reference to the bears’ high-ranking status is made: polar bears often receive a special mention that serves to emphasize them over other animals. For example, Cregor Adventures maintains that the expert guidance provided on their photography tours is “complemented by evening lectures on how best to capture the wonder of Arctic wildlife through the camera’s lens—most notably polar bears, but also Arctic fox, Arctic hare and more!”¹³ In this and other similar examples, polar bears

are portrayed as more “notable” animals because of their interest and importance to human beings.

The tourism industry verbally reinforces and complements these portrayals of polar bears as dignified animals by employing a number of adjectives. Bears are persistently identified as “magnificent” animals: “The Arctic's most magnificent animals [polar bears] gather along the western shores of Hudson's Bay from mid-October to early November” (Tours of Exploration);¹⁴ “the only safe means of seeing these magnificent creatures from close up is from a professional tour vehicle” (Great White Bear Tours);¹⁵ and Frontiers North Adventures explains that among the primary activities on their tour is “a half-day Tundra Buggy excursion into the Churchill Wildlife Management area to view the colorful and abundant flora and fauna of the arctic tundra, including the magnificent polar bear.”¹⁶

Polar bears are also identified as “majestic” creatures. For example, the Churchill Northern Studies Centre hosts a program called “Lords of the North” that invites tourists to “journey onto the tundra aboard specially fitted vehicles to observe these majestic creatures [polar bears] in their natural habitat.”¹⁷ To the same effect, Frontiers North Adventures explains that a particular tour allows guests to spend “plenty of time on the tundra watching majestic polar bears, and other arctic wildlife, in their natural habitat.”¹⁸ Once again, polar bears are emphasized over “other arctic wildlife”. Tours of Exploration overtly attaches this majesty to the male sex (reinforcing its masculine orientation) by stating that on-board the tundra vehicles, “Passengers open windows or stand above the bears on an outside observation deck to photograph females with cubs, young bears sparring and majestic mature males.”¹⁹ Other terminology used often and to the same effect is “regal” and “proud.” For example, in a Natural

Habitat Adventures promotional video, the founder and director of the company, Ben Bressler, explains that he has “always been drawn to these animals, so regal and proud, so majestic and mystifying.”²⁰



Figure 5. Source: Sea North Tours.²¹

Figure 5—an image of a polar bear resting on a rock face—reflects and

visually reinforces the construction of polar bears as dignified “tundra titans” (as articulated elsewhere by Frontiers North Adventures).²²

Polar bears are depicted as generally powerful animals. Often this descriptor is used directly: the Great Canadian Travel Company entices tourists to “[h]op aboard an all-terrain Tundra Vehicle and venture into the frozen wild for close-up encounters with powerful polar bears.”²² The tourism industry verbally enhances this portrayal by employing words such as “mighty” and “fearless”: In a printed brochure, Churchill Nature Tours states that one of the many “wildlife encounters” that tourists can expect is with “the mighty Polar Bear”; and Travel Manitoba insists that polar bears are fearless creatures by stating that they “have no natural enemies and consequently no fear”.²³

The tourism industry visually emphasizes the physical strength and size of polar bears by employing images of bears at close range. Images such as Figures 6 and 7 appear very frequently, highlighting the bears’ facial and bodily features and emphasizing their size, in effect communicating an intimidating or overwhelming presence of a polar bear. Images and filmed

footage of bears sparring or fighting help to enhance this portrayal. A Travel Manitoba video titled “Explore Canada like a local – Face to face with polar bears”²⁶ shows several segments of polar bears sparring or fighting. The footage is slowed, accentuating details that aid in the construction of bears as powerful animals: for example, the heavy movement of the bear’s muscles as he spars, and the deep impact of his blows as he strikes his “opponent.”

Tourism promotional materials invoke persistent masculinized themes in the construction of polar bears as powerful animals. The bears’ dominance, strength, and size are tied to the male

identity. For example, in a promotional video for Natural Habitat Adventures, the founder and director of the company (Ben Bressler) maintains that “in the realm of the polar bear” tourists can experience “[y]oung males play-fight, mothers protect their young, and solitary giant males patrol the shores.”²⁷ Additionally, a masculinized version of the polar bears’ migration to the Western Coast of Hudson Bay can be found on the Frontiers North Adventures website in a blog



Figure 6. Source: Natural Habitat Adventures.²⁴



Figure 7. Source: Great White Bear Tours.²⁵

titled “Cape Churchill Expedition: Mirroring Nature”, written by the company’s communications and marketing manager (Tricia Schers). In this text, the bears’ migration is compared to the seasonal relocation of the company’s mobile lodge to Cape Churchill:

The move to Cape Churchill is an incredible test of both man and machine. Limits are pushed as we endure the elements and the terrain. At points I find myself wondering why on earth are we [*sic*] doing this to ourselves. And then I find myself thinking how truly incredible it is to be part of something like this. To see this massive migration of man and machine mirroring the polar bear migration in nature is what we are here for and both are absolutely astounding. On some level this expedition is perhaps the best way for us to understand what these animals endure, first waiting for the ice to freeze and then as they venture out to hunt.²⁸

In this passage, the polar bears and their migration are construed in masculine terms by invoking the imagery of “man and machine” and endurance through a harsh and hostile landscape.

4.2 Bear as Masculinized Figure in and of Canadian Wilderness

The tourism industry emphasizes “wildness” in its portrayals of the environment in which the polar bears live. This is signified most directly by verbal references to “wilderness” and “wild” spaces. Gregor Adventures explains that on its tours, specially designed vehicles (in this case, Polar Rovers, which are run by Great White Bear Tours) take tourists “into the heart of [polar bears’] wild habitat”.²⁹ In this text, “the heart” is presumably the tundra spanning east of the town of Churchill and into the Churchill Wildlife Management Area. The notion of “wildness” is also extended to the identity of the town itself, as it is either depicted as being nested within this “wilderness” or lying in close proximity. For example, Lazy Bear Lodge insists that viewing the

polar bear holding facility (also referred to as the “polar bear jail”) will give visitors insight into human-polar bear interactions, allowing them to “better understand the challenges of living on the frontier of a wilderness.”³⁰ Elsewhere, the company explains that the absence of road access to Churchill “makes this town a place that is a little on the wild side” and that “[l]iving in Churchill is a lot like living on an island in a sea of wilderness.”³¹

Invoking the dominant Western discourse of nature and wilderness, the tourism industry establishes the “wild” tundra as pristine space. Nature 1st Tours and Transportation invites tourists on a “leisurely” walk “in the pristine wilderness of Boreal Forest, Taiga, Tundra and Marine ecosystems surrounding Churchill” and insists that they “take only pictures” and “leave only footprints”.³² This codes the landscape as one that is untouched; where signs of human interference are deemed out of place. These tours offer an escape into a seemingly “unspoiled” land: the Canadian Tourism Commission invites the audience to come to Churchill to “[g]lide [their] kayak silently along an unspoiled waterway”³³ by booking an expedition with Lazy Bear Lodge, and Lazy Bear Lodge (on their own website) reinforces this construction by asserting that “[visitors’] noiseless kayaks will allow [them] to pass through the wilderness surrounded by the sounds of the forest and the plains, without disturbing the natural beauty. Wildlife thrives here in this unspoiled territory.”³⁴

Churchill and its surrounding environment are also referred to as “the last frontier,” a place that remains unknown or undiscovered. Kensington Tours promises to “reveal the majesty of one of the last great untouched wilderness areas in the world from every angle.”³⁵ To the same effect, Churchill Wild asserts that “Northern Manitoba is one of the most pristine wilderness areas left in the world” and that the coastline of Hudson Bay is “an area so remote

that it hasn't changed in thousands of years."³⁶ Extending beyond the geographies of Churchill and even Northern Manitoba, the Great Canadian Travel Company refers to "[t]he Canadian Arctic" as "one of the world's last great frontiers."³⁷

The wild tundra is often depicted as an unforgiving landscape through imagery of harshness and hostility. For the most part, emphasis is placed on the bitterly cold and icy nature of the expanses of the tundra. For example, Kensington Tours explains that Churchill is located "deep within Canada's frozen tundra" and that one of the offered tours allows visitors to "spend two days traveling through soaring boreal forests and across vast icy plains in pursuit of the frozen north's most majestic creature – the polar bear."³⁸ The company reinforces this

construction elsewhere by stating that "[t]wo specially equipped vehicles will take you deep into the unforgiving tundra in complete comfort."³⁹ Images of individual bears or of a mother and cub

walking across ice or snow (Figures 8 and 9) visually communicate these notions of bitterness and severity, capturing the scene from a distance to accentuate the frozen vastness of the bears' environment.



Figure 8. Source: Natural Habitat Adventures.⁴⁰



Figure 9. Source: Natural Habitat Adventures.⁴¹

Polar bears, much like their environment, are representations of the “wilderness” in which they live and are viewed by tourists. Churchill Wild, discussing mother polar bears and their cubs, states that “[t]hese are pure, wild polar bears living the way they have lived since time began.”⁴² The purity and authenticity of the bears viewed by tourists in Churchill and its surrounding areas are verbally emphasized through persistent use of the term “wild” to identify the bears. For example, responsibletravel.com asserts that “[n]othing can quite prepare you for the thrill of seeing your first wild polar bear, especially when he's roaming just outside the window!”⁴³ This invokes the dichotomy between “captive” and “wild” animals, and although only one side of the dichotomy is mentioned (i.e., “wild” polar bears), the use of the word implies a comparison to “captive” polar bears. Polar bears in Churchill are thus portrayed as being inherently different and more authentic because they possess a wildness and purity that bears in captivity supposedly lack.

This dichotomous view is even more apparent when direct comparisons are made. For example, Cregor Adventures asserts that “[m]ost people who have seen polar bears have seen them in captivity. But few have been able to witness ‘up close’ just why polar bears are referred to as the ‘King of the Arctic.’”⁴⁴ In this passage, polar bears in the “wild” are superior to polar bears who are displayed to visitors in zoos. This is also suggested in the following testimonial featured on the Great White Bear Tours website:

You can see polar bears on the Discovery Channel, or you can go to the zoo. But until you've seen the unflinching wildness in a polar bear's eyes, knowing that it is sizing you up for a meal, you haven't really seen a polar bear.⁴⁵

Similar to the previous example, this passage proposes that free-roaming polar bears in Churchill are more authentic representations of their species than polar bears held in captivity.

The tourism industry discursively constructs the town of Churchill and the polar bears of the Western Hudson Bay area as embodiments of the Arctic and Northern wilderness that is also Canadian in its identity. The Great Canadian Travel Company's virtual greeting to its tourists is "Welcome to Canada's north!"⁴⁶ The context of the polar bear viewing program is embedded in the wilderness of "Canada's north" rather than a locally specific identity of Churchill and nearby coastal areas of Western Hudson Bay. Similarly, Natural Habitat Adventures describes its program titled "Ultimate Churchill Adventure" as a "total immersion in the North" and encourages tourists to "take in the entire Northland experience".⁴⁷ The company continues that "[t]his expedition is [its] most thorough encounter with the world of the polar bear and the Canadian North."⁴⁸ This particular tour program includes an "authentic dog sled ride" on which tourists are promised to "experience the northern boreal wilderness" and "a helicopter trip to a polar bear den".⁴⁹ Natural Habitat Adventures calls this "Ultimate Churchill" excursion "the ultimate North". In this manner, Churchill is often a representation of "Northern" or "Arctic" wilderness in a widely encompassing sense.

Similarly, polar bears themselves are embodiments of this Northern wilderness and its Canadian identity. This is articulated directly in a promotional video created by the Canadian Tourism Commission and featured on the Everything Churchill website, in which a Polar Bear International representative states that

Polar bears are a very special animal to the Canadian people. It is their heritage. Right now, some 66 percent of the polar bears that exist in the world exist here in Canada.

Even on their two-dollar coin, they have the polar bear. Polar bear is Canada as the Arctic is Canada as well.⁵⁰

Therefore encounters with polar bears are portrayed as encounters with the wildness of the Canadian Arctic. The tourism industry encourages visitors to immerse themselves in the Northern experience through a polar bear viewing tour. For example, the Great Canadian Travel Company promises that its tours allow people to “explore the sprawling northlands and spot *Ursus maritimus* in its natural habitat” and to “immerse in the Arctic and get eye-to-eye with the ice bears.”⁵¹ To the same effect, the logo of Churchill Wild features the phrase “touch the arctic”⁵² and these words are repeated throughout a number of the company’s advertisements. Similarly, Lazy Bear Lodge states that via their tours, “adventure becomes accessible and the Arctic comes alive” and urges visitors to “[d]iscover the secrets of Canada's north—and go wild in the Arctic.”⁵³ In these texts, polar bear viewing constitutes an intimate interaction with the bears and their “wildness,” allowing tourists to absorb some of the bears’ wilderness spirit through the immersive nature of the experience.

4.3 Whimsy and Play: Silly, Social Polar Bear

Images of polar bears fighting or sparring are commonly used by the tourism industry. In many cases, these present polar bears in social and playful interactions rather than with imposing or threatening behaviour detailed in Section 4.1. While a particular image may suggest aggression and threat, it communicates a different or extended message when considered as part of a number of interrelated texts. For example, while both Natural Habitat Adventures and Gregor Adventures show a number of images of polar bears sparring or fighting, these companies also refer to these displays of behaviour as “young males play-fighting”^{54, 55}

elsewhere on their websites. To the same effect, Kensington Tours uses language that has a less threatening and more peaceful connotation to describe these behaviours, such as “wrestling” and “playing” (Figure 10).⁵⁶



Figure 10. Image captioned “Bears wrestling”. Source: Kensington Tours.

Additionally, the tourism industry de-emphasizes behaviours that can be interpreted as aggressive, threatening or predatory by making them appear humorous. For example, Travel Manitoba explains that on polar bear excursions, tundra vehicles “protect passengers from curious or hungry bears” (Everything Churchill website).⁵⁷ Similarly, a representative of Churchill Wild (Mike Reimer) explains on the company’s website that

The long awaited ice has finally arrived and the world’s largest carnivores have moved back to their favourite hunting platform, the rugged sea ice, to begin the “fattening” period. Our friendly summer-fall polar bear visitors will spend the winter dining contentedly on yummy seals.⁵⁸

The predatory behaviours of polar bears are often described in a positive and playful tone, making the bears appear less threatening and menacing than they perhaps would otherwise. This is also apparent in a post on Churchill Wild’s “Arctic Adventure Blog”, in which a guest (Iain Campbell) describes his experience with a bear during a ground walking tour:

The bear did not want to back down, and after having noise made and snow thrown at it, he went and hid behind a large rock and kept poking his head above the rock to watch us. Now playing peekaboo with a massive carnivore seems surreal, but every time he popped his head over the rock, we would all make a noise saying, “We still see you Bob”.⁵⁹

In this manner, potential danger and conflict in the interactions between polar bears and human beings are relieved through comedy. Even the polar bear holding facility (a compound that temporarily holds bears who are captured in the Churchill town site) is sometimes referred to with humour: the Great Canadian Travel Company invites tourists to “see the polar bear jail that houses polar bears that get a little too brave”⁶⁰; and Lazy Bear Lodge invites tourists to “[v]isit the ‘bad’ bears of Churchill”⁶¹ at the holding compound. Similarly, Gypsy’s Bakery & Restaurant (an establishment in the town of Churchill) displays an image of claw marks on a door or wall, captioned “Even polar bears come to Gypsy’s”.⁶² The possible threat of close encounters with polar bears is also downplayed in a postcard (Figure 11) comically titled “Rocking the van” and captioned “Meanwhile in Churchill, MB.....”

Therefore most often polar bears are associated with pleasant and positive connotations. They are portrayed as animals who like to play and socialize, and generally enjoy each other’s



Figure 11. Postcard captioned “Meanwhile in Churchill, MB.....” Source: Published by Alex de Vries Photography and purchased from Northern Images.

company. For example, Churchill Nature Tours refers to the area surrounding Churchill as “the heart of a polar bear summer playground.”⁶³ The Heartland International Travel & Tours website features an NBC video in which a researcher working with Polar Bears International (Dr. Tom Smith) explains that polar bears “go out and kind of weigh down the ice and see if it’s going to hold them, and then they just wander around, I think some of it actually is, they meet old friends”.⁶⁴ This playful and pleasant disposition is enhanced by the portrayal of bears as silly, whimsical, amusing, cute and adorable. In an ABC News video featured on the Wat’chee Expeditions website, a newscaster joining a Wat’chee expedition describes a polar bear cub as “a living breathing stuffed animal-like cub poking his little black nose out [of a den], playing and tumbling back inside”.⁶⁵ The newscaster continues: “when you see them they’re like walking fluff balls, pure white, playing and climbing atop impossibly sleepy mother polar bears”. This depiction is not limited to polar bear cubs and is extended more generally to all bears: the Great Canadian Travel Company invites people to “[w]itness 600-kg bears frolic in the snow”



Figure 12. Postcard captioned “Wapusk [is] the Cree name for the great white bear. A polar bear in fireweed looks like a puppy ready to play.” Source: Dennis Fast, postcard purchased from Great White Bear Tours Gift Shop.



Figure 13. Source: Lazy Bear Lodge.⁶⁸

(emphasis added)⁶⁶; and Natural Habitat Adventures states that “as we watch the bears interact, we’re delighted by their antics” (emphasis added).⁶⁷ These constructions are also visually upheld through the persistent use of images that suggest polar bears as cute, playful,



Figure 14. Source: Churchill Wild.⁶⁹

and amusing animals. For example, images such as Figures 12-14 appear frequently in tourism promotional materials.

Polar bears are often anthropomorphized (i.e., ascribed human characteristics) to enhance their playful, silly, and friendly natures. Anthropomorphized interpretations of bears and their behaviours highlight these qualities, making the bears appear more amusing and relatable. For example, Lazy Bear Lodge explains:

Polar bears will occasionally kill seals in the summer, if given an opportunity, but generally consider it too much work. They can be seen chasing flightless geese. For the most part, they are partakers of the couch potato lifestyle, resting on shore and sometimes inland where permafrost is close to the surface and a wallow can be dug into the frost.⁷⁰

To the same effect, Kensington Tours labels an image of a resting polar bear as “Lazy bear”,⁷¹ and bears are depicted “relaxing” (Churchill Wild)⁷² and “lounging” (Nature 1st Tours and Transportation)⁷³ on the tundra. These depictions of bears as animals who laze and lounge

around likely stem from the bears' apparent inactivity during the period of walking hibernation—the time spent on land in iceless months during which the bears try to conserve their energy until the ice freezes and they are able to hunt seals. Other anthropomorphized interpretations of polar bears and the scenarios in which they are captured include the following: a description of an encounter between two polar bear families as a “[t]raffic jam” (Figure 15); a proposal that a polar bear running in the tundra is “[o]ut for a jog” (Figure 16); and a suggestion of a bear’s vanity as he or she asks “[h]ow does this look?” while posing for a photograph (Figure 17).

Such anthropomorphic and comical portrayals of polar bears are also apparent in the souvenirs offered in Churchill tourism gift shops, in which the silly, amusing and cute natures of bears are visually and verbally reinforced. For example, an infant bodysuit offered at the Great White Bear Gift Shop shows a polar bear



Figure 15. Image captioned “Traffic Jam”. Source: Sea North Tours.⁷⁵



Figure 16. Image captioned “Out for a jog”. Source: Churchill Wild, Photographed by Jo Eland.⁷⁴



Figure 17. Image captioned “How does this look?”. Source: Churchill Wild.⁷⁶

standing upright with his or her front legs outstretched as if in anticipation of a warm embrace, featuring the words “Beary Huggable”. Similarly, Northern Images offers a number of sculptures titled “Dancing bear” that display bears in a variety of dancing poses, reinforcing the construction of polar bears as carefree, spirited and delightful animals.⁷⁷ One particular collection of hand-drawn postcards embodies these messages about polar bears: illustrated by Barbara Stone and produced and sold by the Arctic Trading Company, these postcards portray polar bears in a number of anthropomorphized

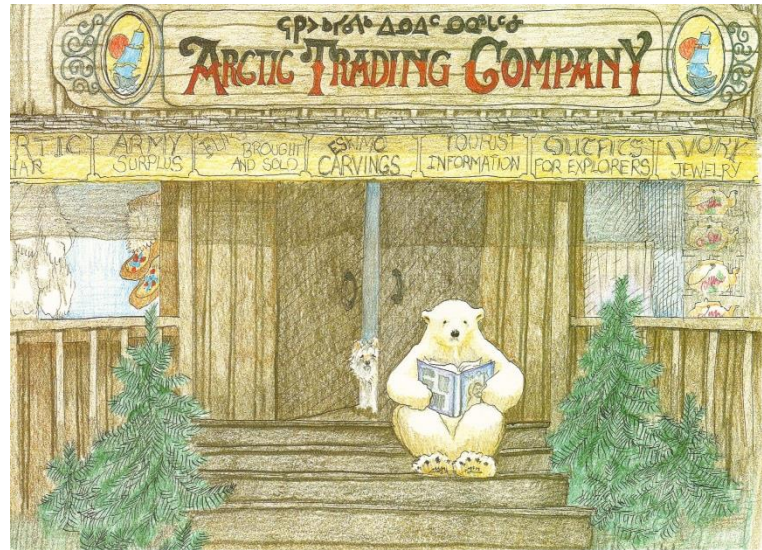


Figure 18. Hand-drawn postcard of a polar bear reading a book. Source: Illustrated by Barbara Stone, produced by and purchased from the Arctic Trading Company.



Figure 19. Hand-drawn postcard of two polar bears sledding. Source: Illustrated by Barbara Stone, produced by and purchased from the Arctic Trading Company.

scenarios and poses. For example, one postcard shows a polar bear sleeping in a bed inside a cabin, tucked underneath a blanket and head resting on a pillow. On the rug in front of the bed lies a pair of slippers. In another postcard, three bears (standing upright on their back legs and

wearing long coats) are shown socializing, engaged in what appears to be a conversation. On the backs of these postcards is the following message:

Bears the trader knows: Living in Arctic Canada we get to know what's important. The weather, our friends and the wildlife. Even Polar Bears like to visit. Here are some of Canada's Polar Bears visiting, dressing up and generally being helpful.

Figures 18-20 are also postcards belonging to this collection and exhibiting similar themes. In these illustrations, the bears are very strongly anthropomorphized and resemble human beings;

they are engaged in activities and display physical features uncharacteristic of their own species. The particular activities chosen for illustration (such as reading a book, sledding, and baking a pie) aid in the construction of polar bears as entirely unthreatening, peaceful, friendly and social creatures.



Figure 20. Hand-drawn postcard of a polar bear baking a pie. Source: Illustrated by Barbara Stone, produced by and purchased

4.4 Inquisitive Polar Bear

The tourism industry persistently employs adjectives such as “curious” and “inquisitive” to describe polar bears. For instance, Natural Habitat Adventures explains that mesh steel floors of the tundra vehicles’ observation decks allow tourists to “come literally within inches of curious bears that often wander beneath [the] vehicles”.⁷⁸ This construction of bears as curious and

inquisitive animals is used to suggest that polar bears seek out social interactions with human beings, such as in the following examples: “Inquisitive bears often approach the lodge” (the Great



Figure 21. Source: Natural Habitat Adventures.⁸⁴

Canadian Travel Company)⁷⁹; and “[o]ften curious polar bears approach the vehicles providing wonderful close range encounters and excellent photographic opportunities” (Tours of Exploration).⁸⁰ Tourists are promised close range encounters with polar bears and these interactions are portrayed to have mutual benefit, satisfying both the



Figure 22. Source: Lazy Bear Lodge.⁸⁵

tourists’ and bears’ curiosities. For example, the Great Canadian Travel Company states, “We look forward to welcoming you to the *Polar Bear Capital of the World* – the season is short and the bears are waiting!” (original emphasis)⁸¹ as if the bears have a fervent interest in interacting with the tourists. To the same effect, Natural Habitat Adventures



Figure 23. Image captioned “Polar bear Mom and cub checking out the new Nanuk Polar Bear Lodge”. Source: Churchill Wild, photograph by Dennis Fast.⁸⁶

explains that “[b]ears often lift their paws onto the sides [of the tundra vehicles] to check us out!”⁸² This construction of bears as curious animals who initiate contact with humans is also apparent in an NBC video featured on the Heartland International Travel & Tours website, in which a researcher working with Polar Bears International (Dr. Tom Smith) states “I’ve been studying them for about twenty years and when you’re studying bears, they’re studying you.”⁸³

This construction is also produced and reinforced visually through the use of images of polar bears in close proximity to human beings and in poses that suggest a curious disposition. Images such as Figures 21 and 22 appear with overwhelming frequency in promotional materials, showing bears in “inquisitive” poses such as leaning



Figure 24. Image captioned “A curious polar bear in Churchill, Manitoba, Canada”. Source: Travel Manitoba, Everything Churchill website, photograph by John Craig.⁸⁷



Figure 25. Image captioned “Where did everybody go?” Source: Churchill Wild.⁸⁸



Figure 26. Image captioned “Polar bear saying goodbye to Seal River Lodge guests”. Source: Churchill Wild.⁸⁹

up against tundra vehicles, reaching toward windows and platforms, and nuzzling or biting fence barriers (characteristic of walking tours).

The use of captions that “interpret” the behaviours displayed in the images helps tour operators articulate and communicate particular messages about polar bears. For example, the captions of Figures 23-26 aid in the construction of bears as curious, inquisitive animals with a keen interest in human beings—a message that the images alone may not have conveyed to the audience.



Figure 27. An original artwork titled “Night Adventure” and captioned “Two curious young bears out for a midnight adventure under a glorious display of the Northern Lights.” Source: Created by Dauna McPherson of Churchill, Manitoba c.1992.⁹⁰



Figure 28. Statue titled “Curious Polar Bear” and captioned “Limestone polar bear standing on hind legs to check out something interesting.” Source: Carved by Lucassie Nakoolak from Coral Harbour, Nunavut.⁹¹

These visually and verbally created and reinforced constructions of polar bears are also apparent in the artwork sold in Churchill tourism gift shops, such as Figures 27 and 28 which represent two works of art available at the Arctic Trading Company.

4.5 Fascinating, Magical, and Awe-Inspiring Polar Bear

The tourism industry portrays polar bears as fascinating and enchanting animals who possess a charm that makes them at once mysterious and mesmerizing. This is signified by frequent verbal references to the captivating magic of the bears: Natural Habitat Adventures

states that its tours bring visitors “within close range of the planet’s most captivating wild creatures”⁹² and elsewhere that the company “fully recognize[s] that most people who travel to witness the magic of the Churchill polar bears do so only one time in their lives.”⁹³ Similarly, responsibletravel.com maintains that one of its tours offers “a perfect balance for those who wish to learn about the history and culture of the region, and experience the magic of the bears.”⁹⁴ Thus, polar bears are constructed as mystical animals experiences with whom are phenomenal and extraordinary. For example, Kensington Tours asserts that “[a]s you paddle your kayak amid playful pods of Beluga whales and watch polar bears stalk their prey on the rugged coastline of Hudson Bay, you’ll be forced to pinch yourself to believe it’s not all a wonderful dream.”⁹⁵ To a similar effect, Travel Manitoba warns tourists to “be prepared” as “Churchill will steal [their] heart[s]”⁹⁶ and Churchill Wild professes that a particular adventure “will touch you like no other experience can.”⁹⁷

As subjects of admiration and fascination, polar bears are pursued or sought by “wildlife enthusiasts” like deeply coveted treasures waiting to be discovered. The “search” for polar bears is articulated frequently such as in the following two examples: the Great Canadian Travel Company explains that on its tours, a “guide and driver will use their vast experience to seek out these amazing animals”⁹⁸; and, in a similar manner, Frontiers North Adventures states that “[t]here will be plenty of photography opportunities as we travel through the tundra in search of the majestic polar bear.”⁹⁹ The tourism industry promises to unveil the secrets of the polar bears and the tundra through this search. For example, Natural Habitat Adventures insists that excursions through the coastal tundra will “reveal the nature and wildlife of the Northland”.¹⁰⁰ At

times, this search or quest is depicted as an act of devotion: both Natural Habitat Adventures and Cregor Adventures refer to Churchill as “a pilgrimage for wildlife photographers”.^{101, 102}

Because polar bears are perceived to be special and rare, they are construed to be reserved for a privileged group of tourists whose experiences are exclusive and private: the Great Canadian Travel Company urges tourists to “[d]iscover the Polar Bears of Churchill on this exclusive get-away”¹⁰³; and Natural Habitat Adventures encourages people to “[j]oin the very few privileged visitors to experience this remote and wild region”,¹⁰⁴ elsewhere stating that the location of its Tundra Lodge is a “private locale that only we have access to”.¹⁰⁵ These exclusive tours facilitate encounters that are special and intimate, and the tourism industry persistently promises “close and personal” interactions with polar bears. The phrase “up close and personal” has a ubiquitous presence in tourism promotional materials, such as the following examples: “Jump on a Tundra Buggy to get up close and personal with the wildlife” (Canadian Tourism Commission)¹⁰⁶; and “this tundra coastal lodge provides the discerning photographer the ability to dedicate long days in the field getting up close and personal with Arctic wildlife” (Churchill Wild).¹⁰⁷

An important part of these intimate, close range encounters is the supposed engagement of the polar bears initiated through eye contact. The tourism industry emphasizes that excursions bring tourists “eye-to-eye” with polar bears. Frontiers North Adventures displays an image of a polar bear looking in the direction of the camera (Figure 29) and the phrase “Lock your gaze” emphasizing the two-way nature of the exchange in which both the tourist’s and the bear’s gazes are intimately engaged. Similarly, Churchill Wild shows an image of a human being and polar bear seemingly entranced by one another in unusually close proximity (Figure 30). To

the same effect, a promotional video made by Travel Manitoba weaves footage of a polar bear walking across the tundra with footage of people sitting inside a tundra vehicle and looking out the window in anticipation, creating the sensation that the bear and the tourists are destined to meet. The bear arrives at the tundra vehicle, lifts his or her head, and looks up at the people, and the narrator slowly says: “it’s a wide-open question for adventure seekers. How will you react when what you’re looking for,



Figure 29. Source: Frontiers North Adventures, photo by Simon Gee.¹⁰⁸



Figure 30. Source: Churchill Wild.¹⁰⁹

looks right back?”¹¹⁰ It is not simply the close presence of a polar bear that is shown to create a profoundly personal experience but also the engagement of the bear’s own gaze that seems to signify willingness and captivation on his or her behalf. This sensation is also established through photographs in which the bear seems to be looking directly at the camera as if recognizing, acknowledging, and even accepting the presence of the person and thus welcoming a genuine interaction.

The tourism industry depicts a familiarity between polar bears and tourists to help establish an intimacy in their encounters. For example, Churchill Wild states that its Nanuk Polar Bear Lodge is a “fabulous place to dine and socialize after a day of *walking with* polar bears” (emphasis added),¹¹¹ as if the bears and tourists explore the tundra in tandem. This is also exhibited in an image that is part of the Nature 1st Tours and Transportation website banner, in which bear paw prints are featured in the snow alongside human footprints suggesting a communion between the two species.¹¹² To a similar effect, the staff of Great White Bear Tours invites people to “[s]tay at [their] custom built Tundra Lodge, *sleeping with* polar bears under the awe inspiring northern lights” (emphasis added).¹¹³ Once again, a familiar and intimate connection is implied.

These proximal and intimate encounters are scripted as facilitating emotional, moving and meaningful experiences. According to Natural Habitat Adventures, Polar Rover vehicles allow the tourists to approach polar bears “at close range without disturbing them, offering a chance for an incredibly moving wildlife experience.”¹¹⁴ The depth of the experience is also articulated in a promotional video created by the Canadian Tourism Commission and featured on the Everything Churchill website, in which a Polar Bear International representative asserts: “There’s no other place in the world that you can feel the breath of a polar bear as it breathes on you and you feel in your heart the importance of this magnificent animal that is covering Northern Canada.”¹¹⁵ In the same video, a Tundra Buggy operator states:

when you get to actually see [polar bears] really close looking right at you, and you can see the detail in their nose and eyes and their claws and it’s really impressive, just what a great animal it is.¹¹⁶

A different Tundra Buggy operator conveys a similar sentiment: “the thrill is actually looking at [the tourists’] faces. Some women, I’ve seen people break into tears, it’s just so beautiful. That’s my reward.”¹¹⁷ Meeting a polar bear’s gaze and interacting with him or her in a secluded, intimate space is thus portrayed as a captivating, magical, and deeply moving experience.

4.6 Female Polar Bear as Figure of Motherhood

The tourism industry frequently invokes the imagery of motherhood to position female polar bears as gentle, affectionate and nurturing animals. Although tourism constructs polar bears as playful, friendly and social animals (as previously discussed), the portrayal of a loving and caring creature is distinct as it is reserved for the polar bear mother. An important part of this construction is the supposed intimacy and bond between the mother and her cub(s). These depictions are achieved most commonly through visual portrayals of the “polar bear family,” although there are also verbal references to the affectionate relationship between a mother and her cub(s). For example, Churchill Wild interprets an image of a mother and cub (Figure 31) as

“Cuddles :)”¹¹⁸ and the Great Canadian Travel Company declares that among the possible sightings on their expeditions, tourists can “[w]atch momma bears nuzzle their cubs.”¹¹⁹ According to the promotional materials, there is something special about the



Figure 31. Image captioned “Cuddles :)”. Source: Churchill Wild, photo by Dennis Fast.

sighting of a mother bear and her cub(s), likely rooted in the idea that the essence of their relationship is unique to the bond between a mother and her child and cannot be experienced through encounters with lone polar bears or adult polar bears gathered in groups. This is articulated in a blog posted on the Frontiers North Adventures website titled “Cape Churchill Expedition: Mirroring Nature” in which the company’s communications and marketing manager (Tricia Schers) describes the close of a polar bear season:

As though on queue [*sic*] while we packed up the Lodge and made our final preparations to leave Cape[,] [a] mom and two coys (Cub of the Year) strolled up along the esker. It was a perfect send off and a moment that we could all savour as our own. There is perhaps nothing more beautiful than the sight of a mom and cubs. What a fitting way to end this journey.¹²⁰

This bond and its moving effect are also emphasized visually: images of mothers and cubs in various poses (such as Figure 32) are ubiquitous in tourism promotional materials, emphasizing intimacy and closeness (both physical and emotional) between the animals. This is also depicted through souvenirs available in Churchill tourism gift shops, such as postcards (Figure 33) and sculptures (Figure 34).



Figure 32. Source: Hudson Bay Helicopters.¹²¹



Figure 33. Postcard titled “Churchill, Manitoba, Canada ‘Polar Bear Capital of the World’”. Source: Harvey Wildlife Photography, purchased at the Churchill Northern Studies Centre.

The tourism industry positions the caring and affectionate polar bear mothers as nurturers and protectors of their cubs. Images of cubs following their mothers across stretches of land or mimicking their mothers' moves (Figure 35) portray the mother as a knowing and trustworthy guide. This depicts an honest dependency, reinforcing the bond between the mother and child. Polar bear mothers patiently teach their cubs about how to be in the world, guidance without which the cubs would not flourish. In a Natural Habitat Adventures online presentation (called "webinar") titled "Conserving Polar Bears in the Arctic", Eric Rock, an "expedition leader and staff naturalist" informs the audience: "just



Figure 34. Caribou hair sculpting titled "Wapusquak" and captioned "Mama and baby polar bear relaxing on the snow." Source: Designed and crafted by Jessie Wastasticoot, offered for sale by the Arctic Trading Company.¹²²



Figure 35. Source: Wat'chee Expeditions.¹²³

like she was taught, she's teaching her cub that Churchill is the best place to be for the first ice to form on the Hudson Bay".¹²⁴ Similarly, in an ABC News video featured on the Wat'chee Expeditions website, owner and operator Michael Spence states "they're emerging from the den so she's introducing them to the world"¹²⁵ upon witnessing a mother and cub emerge together from their den for the first time. The construction of mother bears as patient teachers and their cubs as enthusiastic learners is also apparent in an NBC video featured on the Heartland International Travel & Tours website, in which the newscaster (Mary Carillo) motions toward a

mother and cub and says to the camera: “How sweet is that? Mom and her two kids. They’re listening to their mother, you know what I’m saying?”¹²⁶

While frequent visual references to the intimate relationship between the mother and cub are made by the tourism industry, there is rarely a verbal focus on the mother and cub. Most often, they are juxtaposed against lone male polar bears or male polar bears engaging in a spar in passages that attempt to convey the tundra dynamic. This is apparent in the following examples: “We may see mothers protecting and teaching their cubs, young males play-fighting, or massive adults patrolling the shore as they wait for the bay to freeze” (Natural Habitat Adventures)¹²⁷; “During the daytime, young males play-fight, mother bears cautiously explore with their cubs at their sides, and solitary adults lumber across the tundra” (Cregor Adventures)¹²⁸; and “While the giant males gather on the western shores of the bay, mothers and cubs tend to congregate in areas where they are protected from the dominant adult males” (Cregor Adventures).¹²⁹ This reinforces the construction of polar bears as powerful animals, a generally masculinized construction that in these passages is extended particularly to polar bears of the male sex. Power and strength are only attributed to female polar bear *mothers* when in it is presumably derived from the protective nature instilled in them through motherhood. In an ABC News video featured on the Wat’chee Expeditions website, a newscaster joining a Wat’chee expedition notes “the mother bear’s hulking size seems to unravel as she suddenly climbs out, and with three little ones in tow, pushes on.”¹³⁰ The physical size and intimidating presence of a female polar bear is mentioned in reference to her intuited responsibilities as a mother.

4.7 Polar Bear as Resource

The tourism industry portrays polar bears as resources on which it heavily relies. As resources, polar bears are exploited by the industry to satisfy the viewing interests of tourists. The Churchill Nature Tours website explains that the company's "[q]uality leadership fosters the discovery process and understanding of the natural and cultural resources encountered [in Churchill]".¹³¹ In its brochure, the company reiterates that its "tours are designed to offer intimate encounters with the natural resources of Manitoba." As the primary attractions of the destination, polar bears supply the tourism industry with entertainment: in the Churchill Northern Studies Centre newsletter, a guest author (Jackie Dawson) writes that "[e]xamining climate change vulnerability involves investigating possible changes to both the supply side (i.e. impacts on the bears and natural resources required for viewing) and the demand side (i.e. the visitors themselves) of polar bear viewing in Churchill."¹³²

Together with other animals, polar bears are referred to as a unit or group, identifying the animals as an embodiment of the offerings of the tundra. In this manner, the animals who can be viewed on the Western Coast of Hudson Bay are packaged together for tourist consumption. For example, sometimes polar bears alone, and other times in conjunction with other animals of the tundra, are referred to as "wildlife": Frontiers North Adventures invites people to experience the "[a]we-inspiring landscapes, majestic wildlife, breathtaking sunsets"¹³³ of Churchill; the Canadian Tourism Commission says "[j]ump on a Tundra Buggy to get up close and personal with the wildlife"¹³⁴; and Wat'chee Expeditions, in its Safety Plan, states that among the information required in its records of encounters with other animals is "[w]hat did you see and how many", "[w]here did you see it", and the "[r]eaction of wildlife to your

presence” (original emphases).¹³⁵ In addition to using the term “wildlife” to identify animals, Wat’chee Expeditions states that its Safety Plan “ensure[s] the safety and health of it’s [*sic*] guests and employees while living and travelling in areas populated by polar bears and other wild life-forms endemic to sub-arctic ecosystems”.¹³⁶ To a similar effect, Churchill Wild refers to its online collection of photographs as the “Wild Things Gallery.”¹³⁷ The individualities of the animals within these groups are de-emphasized.

Polar bears are also referred to as “fauna” or “megafauna” of the Tundra environment. For example, the Natural Habitat Adventures website features an excerpt from “Outside” magazine stating that the “company’s goal has been to immerse clients in wilderness and employ naturalists to show them the world’s most charismatic megafauna in 40 countries, from polar bears in Manitoba to tigers in India”.¹³⁸ Similarly, Sea North Tours claims to be “a four seasons destination for the outdoors enthusiast with a great variety of sub-arctic flora and fauna”,¹³⁹ while Churchill Wild refers to one of its tours as its “most diverse and unique program” because of the “backdrop of tundra alive with flora and fauna”.¹⁴⁰ Polar bears are also referred to more generally as “nature” or the “natural environment” that serve as the backdrop or context of tourist experiences. For instance, the Great Canadian Travel Company states that during one of its summer expeditions, guests “will spend four nights at the handcrafted Lazy Bear Lodge with five days to explore the natural beauty of Churchill.”¹⁴¹ Similarly, while discussing the company’s professional experience in its brochure, Churchill Nature Tours explains that “[k]nowing where to go and how to experience it is the key to memorable adventures with nature.” These passages imply that polar bears are part of the “nature” and “natural beauty” to be experienced in Churchill.

Terms such as “wildlife,” “wild life-forms,” “wild things,” and “fauna” de-emphasize the individual animals who are used by the tourism industry and are involved in tourist experiences. The terms blur the individualities and particularities of these animals by portraying them as a non-specific group that is at the industry’s disposal. Even when polar bears are mentioned directly, they are often quantified like resources or supplies. The industry frequently emphasizes polar bears as abundant and plentiful. For example, Natural Habitat Adventures declares:

On our Tundra Lodge adventure, we not only guarantee that you'll see bears—*often scores of them*—we make the bold promise that our Tundra Lodge guests will find no more exciting, higher-quality polar bear adventure out there...this is it! (emphasis added)¹⁴²

Similarly, Tours of Exploration invites tourists to “[j]ourney to Churchill, the ‘Polar Bear capital of the world’ and view at close range *an astounding concentration* of polar bears in their natural environment” (emphasis added).¹⁴³ To the same effect, Churchill Wild insists that its “star attraction is bears – more polar bears than you are likely to encounter anywhere else on earth!”¹⁴⁴ and Kensington Tours promises that its team of experts will bring tourist “up close and person with the region’s *abundant wildlife* and pristine arctic scenery” (emphasis added).¹⁴⁵

The portrayal of polar bears as a generous and abundant resource legitimizes *its* unrestrained and limitless exploitation. The tourism industry reinforces this depiction by describing bears and their environment (i.e., Churchill and nearby areas) as easily accessible. For example, the Churchill Northern Studies Centre states that “Churchill, Manitoba, Canada is known as the accessible arctic” and that “[i]t is home to the most accessible population of polar bears, both for adventure travel and scientific research.”¹⁴⁶ Similarly, Churchill Nature Tours

invites tourists to “[f]ly north to Churchill at the edge of the accessible Arctic”,¹⁴⁷ as if “accessibility” is an inherent trait of this part of the Arctic environment. Thus, polar bears are depicted as a readily available resource to which the tourism industry grants tourists unrestricted access. For instance, Heartland International Travel & Tours explains that the tundra vehicle’s rear platform “allows passengers to get an unrestricted view of the bears.”¹⁴⁸ The tourism industry emphasizes constant proximity of human beings to polar bears, especially in promotions of tundra lodges located east of town on the Coast of Hudson Bay in the Churchill Wildlife Management Area and Wapusk National Park. This is illustrated in the following passages: Cregor Adventures invites people to “[i]magine [themselves] watching the bears day or night from inside or out”¹⁴⁹; Heartland International Travel & Tours clarifies that at one of the lodges tourists get to “sleep with the bears’ and observe them 24-hours a day”¹⁵⁰; Natural Habitat Adventures explains that guests have “constant proximity to polar bears in the area around the clock” due to a “private cabin window or the open-air observation platforms”¹⁵¹; and Frontiers North Adventures asserts that at its lodge, “Guests will enjoy wildlife viewing around the clock as the bears go about their lives in the area surrounding the lodge.”¹⁵²

While the above passages portray polar bears as resources used by the tourism industry to fulfil the “wildlife” viewing interests and demands of tourists, bears are also portrayed (although less frequently) as educational resources: not only do they provide entertainment value, they also offer a learning opportunity for both tourists and researchers. The Heartland International Travel & Tours website features an NBC video in which the newscaster (Mary Carillo) visits Churchill and explains that it “is *the* bear vacation destination, and draws scientists as well as tourists, eager to capitalize on its population” (original emphasis).¹⁵³ This notion is also

conveyed in a Natural Habitat Adventures online presentation titled “Conserving Polar Bears in the Arctic”, in which Eric Rock, an “expedition leader and staff naturalist” informs listeners that

We probably know more about the Western Hudson Bay population of polar bears than any other subpopulation in the world. So it also provides not only an opportunity for people to view and learn about polar bears from ecotourism or the travel side, but also researchers.... Every time a bear is handled, valuable information is taken from it as well. Works out really well for the bears, or hopefully it should work out for the bears, and help present a better picture of what happens in nature. So these bears, I like to think, are helping themselves out as well by being here in the Churchill area.¹⁵⁴

He continues:

We really believe that one of the best ways to learn about these animals is to go and see them. I can't think of a better way. I'm constantly amazed by the different behaviours I see, the things that they teach me about their landscape by spending time watching them.¹⁵⁵

The portrayal of polar bears as resources with educational potential also extends to those bears who have been taken from their natural environment and relocated to a captive setting (such as a zoo). For instance, in its Summer 2010 newsletter, the Churchill Northern Studies Centre features an article titled “A tale of a bear from Churchill” (written by Brian D’Arcy and Bob D’Arcy) that discusses the life of a “problem bear” named Mercedes who was taken from her home in Churchill in 1983 and relocated to the Edinburgh Zoo in Scotland, UK, and later to the Highland Wildlife Park. The article celebrates this as a great accomplishment, explaining:

The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, which runs both Edinburgh Zoo and the Highland Wildlife Park, recognises the value of Mercedes as a champion symbol to promote climate change issues to the general public. A photo display showing polar bears in the Churchill area explains that the southern extreme of the bears' natural range is the first to suffer the adverse impacts; ever longer periods of ice-free conditions on Hudson Bay with no opportunities to hunt the seals that are the natural prey of the bears. The two zoological parks are visited by some 790,000 visitors each year, so this Churchill polar bear has been reaching a lot of people and highlighting the plight of the species and the fragile northern environments.¹⁵⁶

The Churchill Northern Studies Centre (along with the authors of the article) display enthusiasm for the potential of polar bears in captivity to be ambassadors for their species in the "wild." Beyond their abilities to entertain tourists, polar bears are portrayed as having the potential to educate tourists and the broader public on important issues, whether these bears are "accessed" in their natural environment or in a captive and contrived setting.

4.8 Performer in the Tundra Spectacle

The tourism industry portrays the lives and interactions of animals who live on the tundra as a show or performance that tourists attend when they participate in a polar bear viewing tour. Heartland International Travel & Tours asserts that "[e]ach year in the fall, along the west shore of Canada's Hudson Bay, one of the world's most fascinating wildlife events occurs"¹⁵⁷ and elaborates that

Polar bears are normally solitary creatures but in Churchill, at this time of the year, one can see them gathering and mothers and cubs will often be seen together. Wildlife

enthusiasts and photographers throughout the world travel to Churchill in order to witness this and continues remarkable event.¹⁵⁸

Similarly, in a Natural Habitat Adventures promotional video, the founder and director of the company, Ben Bressler, informs the audience of what visitors may witness on a tour (such as mother bears and their cubs, and lone or sparring male bears), adding that it is the company's "sincere hope that this annual spectacle of nature will continue far into the future."¹⁵⁹ In the Tundra Buggy Adventure brochure, the company states that "[t]he annual movement of polar bears along the western shore of Hudson Bay creates one of the greatest wildlife viewing spectacles on earth." The tundra is thus the stage on which nature performs for the attending audience, and the bears' interactions and behaviours are portrayed as enticing, entertaining and exciting performances. Some tour operators depict them as "action": in its brochure, Sea North Tours explains that "[b]ecause our tours leave seven days a week[...]we are able to monitor the movements of wildlife and take you where the action is"; Natural Habitat Adventures states that the "angled windshield [of the tundra vehicles] provides an opportunity for closer viewing when the action is right in front of us"¹⁶⁰; and the Great Canadian Travel Company promotes its summer tours by stressing that "summer is when the wildlife action is hottest with polar bears leaving the pan ice that covers most of the Hudson Bay during the winter."¹⁶¹ To the same effect, Natural Habitat Adventures emphasizes the entertaining nature of the "tundra scene" by stating that "polar bears in the wild offer a natural encounter charged with drama and magic."¹⁶² Consequently, the migration of polar bears toward the Western Coast of Hudson Bay and the observed behaviours during this period are depicted as an entertaining and somewhat theatrical phenomenon.

In this manner, the tourism industry scripts the subjectivities of tourists and polar bears: it is communicated through promotional materials that tourists attend these natural wilderness spectacles to watch the animals perform. Frontiers North Adventures conveys this message by stating that “[t]he polar bear capital of the world—Churchill, Manitoba—*awaits*” (emphasis added),¹⁶³ suggesting that the stage (the tundra) and its entertainers (the polar bears) are waiting to unfold the scene for the audience. These roles are articulated quite directly in promotional materials: Natural Habitat Adventures invites tourists to travel through the tundra “to watch the bears play and interact, *entertaining us* just feet away from our large *picture windows*” (emphases added)¹⁶⁴; and Churchill Wild recounts:

Our resident polar bear “Scarbro” appeared early in the season, which shocked all of us, as we were sure he wouldn’t be back to tolerate us again. Thankfully we were wrong!

Scarbro came and went all season and posed for many fabulous photos.¹⁶⁵

The industry reinforces the subjectivities of tourists as the audience and polar bears as performers to be looked at by emphasizing the “observation” and “viewing” of animals. For example, in a description of a tour program, Natural Habitat Adventure states that

we board our exclusive Polar Rovers for a half-day excursion to explore the subarctic scenery and watch wildlife. Our pace is leisurely as we move over the tundra, pausing whenever we see bears to observe their behavior and capture photos.¹⁶⁶

Similarly, the Great Canadian Travel Company informs the audience that at the end of each day of the tour program, tourists retire to the tundra lodge and “in the light cast by [the] lodge across the frozen tundra[...]look for the illuminated eyes of animals.”¹⁶⁷ The promotional materials exhibit a persistent emphasis on “viewing and photographing” animals (or close

variations of this phrasing). While it is likely that tourists will have some sort of visual experience with the polar bears during the tours, the insistence on “viewing,” “observing” and “watching” animals enhances the subjective positions of the bears as the objects to be looked at. This is also reinforced visually through the use of video footage and images of people watching or excitedly pointing at polar bears from vehicle platforms and windows or during walking tours. Images such as Figures 36 and 37 accentuate the dynamic between the observer and the observed, the spectator and the performer.



Figure 36. Source: Churchill Wild.¹⁶⁸



Figure 37. Image captioned “A polar bear watching the ‘polar bear watchers’ on a tundra vehicle in Churchill, Manitoba, Canada”. Source: Travel Manitoba, Everything Churchill website.¹⁶⁹

The subjective positions of polar bears and tourists in relation to one another are also produced through descriptions of the facilities and transportation that facilitate the viewing of polar bears. For example, the Great Canadian Travel Company invites people to “[s]tay at the unique Tundra Lodge designed for polar bear observation”.¹⁷⁰ The tourism industry emphasizes that the physical features and designs of tundra vehicles are meant to enhance the observation experience: Tours of Exploration explains that on the Tundra Buggy, “Passengers open windows

or stand above the bears on an outside observation deck to photograph females with cubs, young bears sparring and majestic mature males”¹⁷¹; and Natural Habitat Adventures states that the rear viewing platform of the Polar Rover was “pioneered for optimal polar bear viewing” as it consists of a “mesh steel floors that allow [tourists] to come literally within inches of curious bears that often wander beneath [the] vehicles”.¹⁷² The same emphasis is displayed in descriptions of tundra lodges: Churchill Wild explains that its Dymond Lake Lodge features “[e]xpansive picture windows on virtually every wall to maximize viewing”¹⁷³; and Natural Habitat Adventures asserts that its lodge features “[l]arge outdoor viewing platforms” to “further enhance guests’ bear-viewing options”.¹⁷⁴

In addition to the depiction of polar bears as the foci of watchful eyes, the tourism industry constructs them as objects to be photographed or captured on film, making their positions as performers or photographic props even more pronounced. Tourists are frequently encouraged to photograph bears: for example, Natural Habitat Adventures advises tourists to “keep [their] camera[s] at the ready” while “dinner is served in the Tundra Lodge dining room” as they “may see polar bears wandering right outside the windows”.¹⁷⁵ Churchill Wild also insists that tourists “keep [their] camera[s] ready to go” as “[p]hoto opportunities present themselves while out on hikes”.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, Frontiers North Adventures explains in its 2013 catalogue and magazine that one of the five ways to get the most out of an adventure is to “take plenty of photos”. While the suggestion that tourists bring their cameras on their trips are implied in the above passages, Frontiers North Adventures explicitly states that among the items to pack for the trip are a “[c]amera and extra camera batteries and memory card”.¹⁷⁷ Images of visitors taking photographs of polar bears, such as Figures 38 and 39, also portray the polar bears as

objects to be photographed, and the relationship between tourists and polar bears as one that is mediated by a photography device.

The capture of polar bears through photography is depicted as a natural and harmless activity, one that is even expected on the tours. Nature 1st Tours and Transportation insists on a philosophy of "tak[ing] only pictures, leav[ing] only footprints",¹⁸⁰ suggesting that photographing polar bears and other animals in their natural environment is

low-impact and non-consumptive. Polar bears

are not constructed as passive subjects in these texts: they are portrayed as active and willing participants in the tourists' quest for photographic excellence. This message is embodied in

Figure 40, its caption "Picture perfect" implying the bear's instinctive readiness to pose for a flawless photograph. Because the animals of the tundra environment supposedly accept tourists' desires for perfect photographs and even assist in their fulfilment, photography is unlimited and entirely unrestricted—bears can be accessed for photographs at any time. For example, Natural Habitat Adventures insists that because its "lodge has plenty of common areas[...photographers have plenty of space to shoot at will".¹⁸² This aspect of the relationship or exchange between



Figure 38. Source: Wat'chee Expeditions.¹⁷⁸



Figure 39. Source: Natural Habitat Adventures.¹⁷⁹

tourists and polar bears is thus dictated by the will of the photographer, while the natural setting and its props remain ceaselessly ready to be photographed.



Figure 40. Image captioned "Picture perfect!" Source: Churchill Wild.¹⁸¹

The use of photography equipment

has an even stronger emphasis in discussions of photography-specific tours, which are offered by many operators. Because the capture of animals on film is the focal point of these programs, the practice of photography and the equipment involved are highlighted in descriptions of tour programs and tourists' experiences in the tundra environment. For example, Kensington Tours explains that

this incredible trip is a rich playground for photographers. Your zoom lens will have little work to do as your experienced team of nature experts get [*sic*] you up close and personal with the region's abundant wildlife and pristine arctic scenery.¹⁸³

Similarly, Churchill Wild states that upon arriving and settling in to its Seal River Heritage Lodge for the Polar Bear Photo Safari, "it's time to assemble all those priceless cameras, hard drives, and tripods and start burning some serious gigabytes!"¹⁸⁴ Passages describing photography tours convey the image of a hunt for the perfect picture, and then a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment as the tourist-photographers achieve their trophy photographs. This is illustrated in the following examples: Cregor Adventures promises that its leaders and guides are "dedicated

to helping you get the perfect shot” and will “help ensure you leave with the images you came for”¹⁸⁵; and the Great Canadian Travel Company insists that “you will have your professional photographer alongside to assist with capturing ‘the perfect shot’, and a naturalist guide who knows the picture perfect areas in and around town”.¹⁸⁶ Thus, tourist-photographers pursue the animals of the tundra environment in a grand attempt to capture them in a “perfect shot.”

CHAPTER 5: PRIVILEGED DISCOURSES

In this section, I aim to explore how the dominant constructions of polar bears identified and discussed in Chapter 4 are legitimized and maintained by the polar bear tourism industry. To do so, I reveal the discourses and practices that work to produce and favour certain meanings of polar bears and script a particular touristic experience, namely:

- masculinist (and masculinizing) discourses of wilderness and Canadian nationalism;
- authoritative accounts of direct experience and Western science; and
- narratives of responsibility toward the natural environment.

In this effort, I address how tourism produces and reproduces its “effects of truth,” i.e., how the industry works alongside other discourses and social forces to persuade the audience of certain “truths” about polar bears and human-polar bear dynamics. For example, the construction of “the polar bear” as a “wild masculine bear” is embedded in and recreated (in large part) by the discourses of wilderness and Canadian nationalism that envision nature as a pristine wilderness space (explored in Section 5.1). I do not aim to associate each of the eight constructions identified in Chapter 4 with a particular discourse or discursive practice, however, because of the overlapping nature of the various meanings of polar bears and the mechanisms that uphold them. While the masculinist and masculinizing discourses of wilderness and Canadian nationalism emerged with clarity and strength in this analysis, likely because of the dominating presence of the “wild masculine bear” in promotional materials, some of the other constructions are maintained more subtly. Consequently, in this section I ask myself how the audience is encouraged by the tourism industry to accept these various “truths.” In exploring this question, I

developed the sense that essentially all of the constructions of truth about polar bears and human-polar bear dynamics identified in Chapter 4 rely on, and are maintained partly by, two key forces: Firstly, the *authoritative* accounts of the promotional materials and the agents who created them (Section 5.2 discusses this “social authority” in more detail); and secondly, the narratives of *responsibility* toward the natural environment circulating through the promotional materials (explored in Section 5.3). Both of these forces work to instill and reinforce trust between the audience and the producer of the texts, making the interpretations of the tourism companies and the messages of the promotional materials appear “true” and “common-sense.”

5.1 Masculinist Wilderness Ideal and Canadian National Identity

5.1.1 Nature-as-Wilderness Discourse

The tourism industry portrays polar bears as representations of and figures in wilderness, constructions that are structured by a particular perspective on nature as a wilderness space. This discourse serves to legitimize the imagining of polar bears as embodiments of the “wildness” of the “natural” spaces they inhabit. While the concept of wilderness has varying meanings across the globe, “the focal point of virtually any mental image of wilderness must be a wild and natural landscape that contrasts with the highly-modified world most of us live in” (Cole, 2000, p. 77). In this popular conceptualization of nature, the wilderness landscape is seen as pristine, natural, and isolated (Simon & Alagona, 2009): the Sub-Arctic, for example, is often constructed as a “zone of purity; a white wilderness” (Shields, 1991, p. 61). As my analysis reveals, the tourism industry frequently invokes the nature-as-wilderness discourse to script the “wild” tundra landscape as a pure space. For instance, Churchill Wild asserts that one of its adventures offers the opportunity to photograph “Arctic wildlife” in “a pristine untrammelled

wilderness setting.”¹⁸⁷ As part of this discourse, pristine and sublime nature is “constructed around awe-inspiring vastness and grandeur” (Neumann, 1998, p.16). The tourism industry frequently accentuates the impressive expanses and “vast icy plains” of “Canada’s frozen tundra” (Kensington Tours),¹⁸⁸ along with the glorious and fascinating nature of the polar bears and their natural environment (see Section 4.5). Cregor Adventures, for example, refers to the tundra as “a remote and starkly beautiful environment”.¹⁸⁹

The tourism industry also portrays the natural environment as untouched or unpeopled, implying that these characteristics help to maintain a landscape that is in a pristine and utterly natural state. Kensington Tours, for example, promises to “reveal the majesty of one of the last great untouched wilderness areas in the world from every angle.”¹⁹⁰ Wilderness, in the nature-as-wilderness discourse, is “characterized by wildness, naturalness, lack of human influence and lack of human control” (Cole, 2000, p. 77), disciplining us to view the absence of human habitation and interference as a necessary requirement for the preservation of “pristine nature.” The absence of any traces of other human beings, therefore, is vital for preserving the perception of pristine wilderness (Callicot, 2002) and for producing/consuming experiences that offer people “a window to the past, to the remote beginnings of humankind long before the comforts of modern life” (Gomez-Pompa & Kaus, 1992, p. 272). This vision of nature as an untouched space is evident in the images used by the tourism industry, which visually script the tundra as an uninhabited and unpeopled landscape. In particular, tundra vehicles are often shown in isolation or in pairs (Figure 41) and seldom do images reveal the congestion and traffic that can be experienced on the tundra during the busy season.



Figure 41. Source: Travel Manitoba.¹⁹¹

According to Simon and Alagona (2009), the wilderness ideal makes one of two assumptions: either “the current state of wilderness areas represents their natural, pristine condition” (p. 25) or “the most natural, pristine version of nature is not today’s wilderness, but rather the one encountered by the area’s first white explorers” (pp. 25-6). Both of these reflect embeddedness in colonial history: the vision of wilderness as pristine and untouched nature can be seen as emerging from Western history, at the time of the arrival of early European explorers to the Americas (Callicot, 2002). Since the “new world” to which the Europeans arrived did not resemble to them the “humanized landscape” of their homeland, they perceived it as “pristine wilderness” (Callicot, 2002, p. 175). The discourse of wilderness discursively endows the natural environment with the ability to offer people an experience with a landscape in the same pristine and untouched state as was first encountered by early European explorers. Gomez-Pompa and Kaus (1992) refer to this version of wilderness as a “mythical pristine environment that exists

only in our imagination” as “[s]cientific findings indicate that virtually every part of the globe[...][has] been inhabited, modified, or managed throughout our human past” and that “although they may appear untouched, many of the last refuges of wilderness our society wishes to protect are inhabited and have been so for millennia” (pp. 273-4). In the particular case of North America, we know that although the Europeans thought they discovered a pristine wilderness, Aboriginal inhabitants were already living on the land for many years (Callicot, 2002). These “last refuges of wilderness” are also not isolated from human-induced global scale changes, such as environmental pollution and degradation, and climatic change.

Nonetheless, the discourse of wilderness orders landscapes such that they remain in a state of perceived purity and naturalness that existed before human interference (Gomez-Pompa & Kaus, 1992), offering people an escape from modern civilization. The workings of this discourse are evident in the tourism promotional materials analyzed in this study: Churchill Wild, for example, encourages tourists to travel to “the distant regions of civilization” to discover “a land virtually untouched by man’s restless hand”.¹⁹² The supposedly unspoiled natural lands (re)created by this discourse are timeless (Simon & Alagona, 2009): they remain unchanged, offering visitors a look at natural lands in “a state that existed at some time in the past” (Cole, 2000, p. 77). The idea of looking through the eyes of European explorers at a timeless land is echoed in the following passage in which Lazy Bear Lodge describes a tour along Matonabee Creek, a stream southwest of Churchill:

After a hearty breakfast we board our flight or helicopter to our river launch spot at Matonabee Creek in the rich, boreal forest of Northern Canada[....]Our next three days take us away from the normal comfort of civilization. This is like taking a trek back in time

when the early explorers such as Sam Hearne and his trusted guide Matonebee spent two years walking across these same barren grounds to the Arctic Ocean carrying only the tools they needed to survive on their backs. They were employed by the Hudson Bay Company to “make peace and to make trade with the Indians.” Hearne became the first of his race to cross Canada’s barren grounds by foot and the first white man to see the North American moose and the Canadian musk ox. His exploration took him from Fort Prince of Wales in Churchill to the shores of the Arctic Ocean, and back to Churchill. With a population density unchanged since Columbus came to America, the region you are entering remains much as he saw it over 230 years ago.¹⁹³

In this passage of survival, exploration and adventure, the audience is promised to experience the northern landscape much like Sam Hearne, an English explorer, once did. Reflecting the wilderness ideal, the natural environment of Northern Manitoba is constructed as one frozen in time, a representation of “things as they were when the ‘white man’ first came to the scene” (Callicot, 2002, p.176).

While the wilderness discourse codes the natural landscape as pristine, untouched, and timeless space, this construction also extends to the land’s other-than-human animal inhabitants: “Mountains, deserts, forests, and wildlife all make up that which is conceived as ‘wilderness,’ an area enhanced and maintained in the absence of people” (Gomez-Pompa & Kaus, 1992, p. 294). As figures *in*, and also *of*, wilderness, polar bears are perceived to embody the qualities of purity and timelessness attached to the tundra. While this is often implicit in promotional materials (for example, through suggestions that bears and the tundra share a “wild” spirit), it is also articulated directly by the tourism industry: Churchill Wild, discussing

mother polar bears and their cubs, states that “[t]hese are pure, wild polar bears living the way they have lived since time began.”¹⁹⁴ This passage invokes the notion of an ancient and/or original version of the species, unchanging through time and possessing an authenticity unique to a “true” polar bear.

5.1.2 Discourse of Canadian Nationalism

In the Canadian context, the vision of nature as a wilderness space is intertwined with nationalist discourse. Canadian national identity is tied to the notion of nordicity: Shields (1991) refers to the North as “the soul or psyche of Canada” (p. 61). While the Canadian North may represent “prototypical wilderness” (Crane, 2012, p. 57), this Northern identity is dynamic and complex. Grace (2001) writes that “[t]o ask where North *is* and what North means is to open a veritable Pandora’s Box on identity” (original emphasis, p. 48), and that the meanings of the phrases “the North” and “true north strong and free” are not static—Canadians are “constantly imagining and constructing Canada-as-North” (p. xii). According to Hulan (2002), the idea of “Canada-as-North” is a way of building a national identity: in a land inhabited by a diversity of groups, the “environment holds the transformative potential to condition and form a distinct cultural identity, to facilitate acculturation, and thus to bring political unity” (p. 10) and in doing so, “to smooth over differences” (p. 4).

This Northern identity persists today, beyond its embeddedness in the Canadian National Anthem. The official website of the Government of Canada presents a document titled “Canada’s Northern Strategy: Our North, Our Heritage, Our Future” which outlines the government’s vision for the North (Government of Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs, 2009). The document begins by stating that “Canada is a Northern nation. The North is a fundamental part of our heritage and

our national identity, and it is vital to our future.” The document also supports a 2008 quote from Prime Minister Stephen Harper affirming the importance of the North to the Canadian government:

The geopolitical importance of the North and Canada's interest in it have never been greater. That is why this government launched an ambitious Northern agenda, based on the timeless responsibility so elegantly captured by our national anthem – to keep the True North strong and free.

This federal document communicates the role of the North in the formation and maintenance of Canadian national identity. Polar bears are also distinctly a part of this identity: unsurprisingly, the website banner for Canada’s Northern Strategy features an image of a polar bear (Figure 42). This message is articulated clearly by the tourism industry: in a Frontiers North Adventures promotional video, a representative of the company explains that “there’s a fascination [with the polar bear] particularly in Canada because it’s a cultural icon, it’s a very important symbol for the North”¹⁹⁵; and the title of one of Natural Habitat Adventures webinars is “Polar bears: The Arctic’s most iconic creature”.¹⁹⁶ Polar bears are representations of the Canadian Northern spirit, imparting this identity to the town of Churchill: the Great Canadian Travel Company, for example, explains that with the increasing popularity of polar bear tourism, Churchill “has grown



Figure 42. Source: Government of Canada, *Indian and Northern Affairs*, 2009.

to become one of Canada's tourism icons."¹⁹⁷ Polar bears are figures in and representations of the Canadian Northern wilderness, the same environment that is part of the Canadian identity. By emphasizing touristic experiences with polar bears in their "natural environment," the tourism industry appeals to nationalist ideologies of what it means "to be Canadian" or to experience Canada.

5.1.3 Masculinization of the Polar Bear and "His" Space

While North is a "complex construction", "compris[ing] many ideas of North and many norths" and "existing in and changing over time" (Grace, 2001, p. 105), it is also a gendered concept. Some authors interpret the northern wilderness as a feminized space awaiting male exploration: Grace (2001), for example, maintains that the North has been constructed as "an objectifiable feminine Other in the physical terrain" (p. 48), "a female hoarding her treasure" (p. 95), who must be "penetrated, revealed, put to use, tamed, and controlled" (p. 48) to "test white male identity, virility, and competence" (p. 73). This interpretation is similar to Pritchard's and Morgan's (2000) analysis of the representation of the south and east: the authors assert that these are also feminized, constructed as exotic, seductive, passive, and vulnerable female landscapes. Structured by the "discourses of patriarchy and (hetero)sexuality", these constructions are "scripted for a male heterosexual audience" (p. 886).

While the construction of nature as a pristine, timeless, and untouched space awaiting discovery (as discussed in Section 4.2) suggests the feminization of the tundra landscape, other aspects or constructions of the tundra emphasized in tourism promotional materials point to the masculinization of this space. Pritchard and Morgan (2000) observe that in contemporary tourism promotion, northern environments are scripted as "active, wild, untamed, and often

harsh and penetrative” (p. 897). Similarly, the tundra landscape (as scripted by the polar bear viewing industry) can be interpreted as a hyper-masculine opponent who is wild, rugged, untamed, and unpredictable—much like some primitive, uncivilized version of the man who ventures into this land today as part of a touristic quest for the ultimate polar bear viewing experience. The tundra landscape is construed as rather “penetrative” (to use Pritchard’s and Morgan’s (2000) term) in its harshness, suggesting a masculine orientation. The themes of exploration, adventure, and endurance in this severe and rough environment mimic a battle between men: the male adventurer escapes the realm of feminine civilization and domestic responsibilities to “outmuscle” his opponent. Thus, the tundra is a space where the masculine adventurer matches the masculine landscape.

While I observe the workings of a masculinized wilderness discourse in the constructions of the tundra environment, I believe it is important to note indications of a feminized landscape to convey the complicated, dynamic, and somewhat muddled characters of the various discourses and the “truths” they maintain. This complexity is discernable in the following examples: Churchill Wild invites guests to “hike on [the] rugged and starkly beautiful coastline”,¹⁹⁸ describing the tundra coastal lodge as a “[w]ildly rugged and remote” accommodation¹⁹⁹; and Frontiers North Adventures urges the audience to “[e]xperience the extent of Churchill’s wild beauty with its rugged coastline”,²⁰⁰ stating elsewhere that “[w]ith a landscape that is both breathtaking and harsh, Cape Churchill truly encapsulates the realm of the polar bear.”²⁰¹ In these and other similar examples the themes of icy vastness, hostility, and harshness are blended to imagine the tundra as an unforgiving landscape. However, notions

such as beauty and purity in these same examples infuse the tundra with a typically feminine character.

Regardless of the intended orientation of the tundra landscape, like other Northern environments, it is scripted for a male audience (Pritchard & Morgan, 2002). As a “masculine playground” (Pritchard & Morgan, p. 897), the character of the Canadian North is “tied to strength, hardness, self-reliance and masculinity” (Lafleur, 1996, p. 287). The gendered nature of the wilderness discourse is rooted in a dichotomy between rural or wild spaces, and urban, domesticated, civilized spaces (Saul, 1999). According to Saul (1999), in the North-as-wilderness construction, the male escapes “from the constraints of domestic responsibilities” into the “unconquerable wilderness”—the “antithesis of ‘home base’ and the domain of women and families” (p. 96). Thus, wilderness, in this western narrative of nature, is a “proving ground for masculinity” (Bond, 2007), a space where a man can reinvigorate his virility and reconfirm his masculinity (Comer, 1997). A popular way to accomplish this is to earn individuality through acts of endurance and survival (Hulan, 2002): the notions of exploration, adventure and challenge, culminating in man’s brave conquest of nature, are vital to these male wilderness spaces (Cloke, 2005). Warren (1996) describes this wilderness adventure as a “heroic quest” in which the individual “hears a call to adventure, leaves home, encounters dragons on the way and slays them, reflects on his conquest, and returns home as a hero with a clearer understanding of himself” (p. 16). Embedded within this adventure wilderness story is a colonial narrative, as the “heroic quest” echoes the experiences of the early European explorers in the Americas. As Shields (1991) explains, the Canadian North has historically “been the space of pilgrimages – to

the Pacific, to the Orient, to the Pole, and so on. It has been the space of the pilgrimage moment of 'between-ness', of travelling and of the quest, between home and goal." (p. 174).

The promotional materials of the Churchill tourism industry reflect this wilderness discourse, ripe with "narratives of rugged individualism" (Hulan, 2002, p. 186) and feats of arduous travel and heroic conquest characteristic of the North. Tour operators often refer to their tours as "expeditions" and "adventures": Cregor Adventures states that at night-time, "the northern environs provide an eerie and remote adventure"²⁰²; Great White Bear Tours promises the audience "the adventure of a lifetime"²⁰³; and Churchill Wild refers to the touristic experience as "[y]our journey of exploration and adventure".²⁰⁴ Moreover, tourists immerse in the wilderness adventure through the stories of others: Churchill Wild explains that during one of its tours, "your hosts and guides will regale you with tales of life and adventures in Canada's Arctic."²⁰⁵ The tourists' own "Northern adventures" are driven primarily by the pursuit for polar bears: The Great Canadian Travel Company invites tourists to "venture onto the vast tundra on a quest for the sightings of these magnificent creatures in their natural environment"²⁰⁶; and the Churchill Northern Studies Centre urges the audience to take an "excursion" upon a tundra vehicle "to search for the magnificent polar bears".²⁰⁷ The Great Canadian Travel Company draws the audience to "Discover the Polar Bears of Churchill",²⁰⁸ suggesting, as other tour operators do, that this quest through the cold and harsh tundra landscape will reveal the polar bears and their icy "realm."

The tourism materials analyzed in this study display not only a gendered construction of space, but also "the gendered body within space" (Crane, 2012, p. 57). The masculinizing discourse of wilderness normalizes the construction of polar bears as powerful "Lords" and

“Kings” of the Arctic, a construction in which polar bears and their various energies (such as their strong and imposing presence) are associated with maleness and masculine identity. While the bears’ dominance, strength, size and other characteristics are already part of a generally masculinized construction, they are also directly tied to the male identity in tourism promotional materials through clarifications that these qualities belong primarily to the male polar bears (see Section 4.6). This masculinizing discourse privileges a masculine polar bear identity, suggesting that the “Lord” and “King” of the North is most suitable to endure the harsh and hostile landscape of his “domain.”

5.2 Social Authority of Direct Experience and Western Science

As a “heavily masculinist” construction, the discourse of the North “also assumes and reiterates the male author’s first-hand physical and intellectual *knowing*, experience, and expertise, a knowledge that circles back to confirm his masculinity” (original emphasis, Grace 2001, p. 48). (The masculinist orientation of Western scientific knowledge is discussed in more detail in Section 6.4). This is evident in the tourism materials analyzed in this study: the constructions of truth (re)produced by the industry are often legitimized by a persistent emphasis on the expertise of the tour operators and their various employees. A significant element of the supposed competence and skilfulness of the operators is their experience in the industry. Often this experience is localized, specific to Churchill and its surrounding areas, portrayed as equipping the tour operators with an intimate knowledge. For example, Wat’chee Expeditions explains that “Wat’chee guides are indigenous to the arctic area and their expertise is second to none.”²⁰⁹ Similarly, Frontiers North Adventures maintains that it is “a family owned and operated business that has been providing adventures in Canada’s north for almost three

decades.”²¹⁰ Tour operators frequently refer to their local roots and ties to highlight their intimate knowledge of the areas in which they operate. For instance, Nature 1st Tours and Transportation informs the audience that the company’s owner and main guide are “Local Naturalists” who “have lived and worked in Churchill with a combined experience of over 45 years” and that “[b]oth have extensive experience in arctic environments and working with wildlife.”²¹¹ Frontiers North Adventures also emphasizes its local experience, stating that the company has “built relationships with local people on the land that makes the difference between a cool vacation and an amazing, intimate adventure.”²¹²

When locally authenticated experience is not emphasized, the tour operators and their guides are still positioned as “experienced” and “seasoned” professionals: for example, Natural Habitat Adventures self-identifies as “the world’s most experienced nature travel company”²¹³; Lazy Bear Lodge insists that “[y]our experienced guide will take you to polar bear hot spots”²¹⁴; and Kensington Tours explains that “[y]our experienced team of local guides, nature experts and private drivers will move mountains to ensure you get the best opportunity to view elusive arctic wildlife”²¹⁵ and elsewhere that “the secret sauce behind every one of [its] tailor-made experiences” is “[s]easoned destination experts intimately versed on the new, the old, the different, the must-sees, the off-the-beaten track and the out-of-this-world.”²¹⁶ These and other similar passages communicate to the audience that experience equips the tour operators with tourism-related knowledge—the companies and their guides are scripted as knowing how best to facilitate travel experiences for their guests. The companies and their representatives are also scripted as bearers of intimate knowledge about polar bear behaviours and human-polar bear interactions, acquired through many years of observation and interaction with polar bears in

various contexts. In the texts analyzed in this study, emphasis on this “endowment” functions to justify the scripted identities of tour operators and their guides as “experts,” “specialists,” and “leaders” in the various aspects of polar bear tourism. Their “knowledgeable” dispositions are emphasized with overwhelming frequency.

Access to Western scientific knowledge is another important element of the tour operators’ and guides’ expertise on polar bears and polar bear tourism. The social authority of the institution of science affords a sense of credibility to the claims made by the tourism industry. Several tour operators accomplish this by affiliating with science-oriented organizations. For example, Frontiers North Adventures explains that it was “the first major sponsor of Polar Bears International [PBI], a non-profit organization dedicated to the worldwide conservation of polar bears through research and education” and that the company continues to “work with PBI on a number of conservation initiatives and programs.”²¹⁷ Frontiers North Adventures elaborates:

Through our exclusive partnership with PBI, we provide an opportunity for our guests to learn first-hand from PBI species experts who join us on our Tundra Buggies and at our Tundra Buggy Lodge. Presentations add to the in-depth interpretation provided by our tour leaders and interpretive drivers, offering our guests with an opportunity to not just see polar bears but to learn about them in a way that will leave a depth of knowledge about these majestic animals.²¹⁸

Frontiers North Adventures also benefits from the social authority of an institution of government: the company explains that it works together with Parks Canada (an agency of the government of Canada) “to provide a safe and enjoyable polar bear viewing and learning

experience at Cape Churchill in Wapusk National Park.”²¹⁹ Frontiers North Adventures elaborates that it is “particularly proud to be the only company in the world to be granted a business license from Parks Canada to host guests overnight in Wapusk National Park.”²²⁰ These connections to the socially powerful institutions of science and government help to legitimize the tour operator and its claims about polar bears and human-polar bear interactions.

Similarly, Natural Habitat Adventures declares that it is the official travel partner of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), “the world’s leading environmental conservation organization”.²²¹ The company asserts that aside from possessing years of experience, its expedition leaders receive additional training from WWF’s “top scientists”, making them the most knowledgeable and “highest-quality guides in the industry.”²²² Harnessing the social authority of scientific knowledge, Natural Habitat Adventures reiterates that “[w]ith [WWF’s] top scientists and staff by our side in the planning process, and with years of experience scouring the planet for the world’s most captivating nature destinations, we possess resources and insight not available to other tour companies.”²²³

Great White Bear Tours also affiliates with the institution of science by acknowledging the work of the Churchill Northern Studies Centre (CNSC), a non-profit research and education facility: “We gratefully support the [CNSC] whose research provides information required for our company and all residents and visitors to Churchill, to respect and protect our Polar Bear population and protect and sustain our environment.”²²⁴ Unsurprisingly, the CNSC refers to its identity as a science institution to promote its courses or tours:

Each five to seven day course is a true learning experience led by professional scientists and expert guides. Participants will develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of

the culture, history and wildlife of the Churchill area through daily interaction with visiting scientists and fellow travellers. There are no tests and no grades, but guided tours and presentations will open new doors to learning for even the most seasoned traveller.²²⁵

The notion in the above passage of “professional scientists” leading a “true learning experience”, as well as the mention of tests and grades, highlight the embeddedness of the CNSC in the scientific paradigm.

The authority of the expertise of the tour operators—reinforced with the socially powerful institutions of tourism, science, and government—legitimizes the constructions of polar bears that are (re)produced by the industry in tourism promotional materials. The tour operators and their representatives are trusted to exemplify appropriate interactions between polar bears and human beings, as well as to interpret the behaviours of bears observed on tours: Frontiers North Adventures asserts that the driver of the tundra vehicle “will navigate throughout the WMA [Churchill Wildlife Management Area] in search of polar bears and other arctic wildlife while [a] knowledgeable interpretive guide will offer insights to the lives of these incredible animals.”²²⁶ The established authority of the tour operators renders these interpretations credible and worthy, legitimizing the various constructions of polar bears as discussed in Chapter 4. To further validate these constructions, the various natures of polar bears are communicated as simple and certain “truths” that are also natural and common-sense: for example, bears are portrayed as naturally inquisitive, social, and playful animals, constructions of truth that help to support the frequent claim that bears “often approach [tourists] directly” (Natural Habitat Adventures)²²⁷ of their own volition. These interpretations of

the bears and their behaviours appear necessarily true, attributable not only to the fabricated social authority of the tourism industry and its operators but also to the confident and certain manner in which they are communicated.

In a similar manner, the tourism industry dictates how people generally feel about and react to polar bears, scripting the touristic experiences of guests. For example, the Great Canadian Travel Company maintains that “[i]nquisitive bears often approach the lodge, which features rows of windows and fenced observation decks to accommodate our own curiosity. We spend hours watching them interact, delighted by their antics and rugged beauty.”²²⁸ This passage not only claims that polar bears are naturally curious and social animals, it establishes as a “truth” that all tourists are also naturally curious and necessarily “delighted” by the beauty of the bears. Similarly, Great White Bear Tours explains that the height of the tundra vehicles “is most important to assist in keeping the tourists from petting the bears and to allow superior visibility”,²²⁹ suggesting that all tourists have an innate desire to pet the creatures who they supposedly perceive to be cute and cuddly. To a similar effect, Natural Habitat Adventures states in its description of a tour itinerary that

We find *Ursus maritimus* [polar bears] even more majestic up close than we could have imagined. Yet these giant bears, the largest land carnivores in the world, are charming and whimsical, too, and we are aware of what a rare treasure it is to see them in their wild habitat. (original emphasis)²³⁰

This passage is written as if the tour is already underway; the pronoun “we” encompasses the company’s representatives as well as the reader of the text (as if he or she is already partaking in the tour), thus dictating the sentiments and experiences of the audience well in advance of the

actual trip. With such certainty, the tourism industry scripts touristic experiences and tourists' responses to encounters with polar bears. In its discussion of the tundra lodge, Natural Habitat Adventures states, "Don't be surprised[...]if our meal is interrupted by a mad dash to the windows to watch a polar bear lumbering across the snow around the lodge",²³¹ advancing a particular reaction to the sighting of a bear. Similarly, Kensington Tours maintains that on one of its expeditions, "As your heart rate quickens and your adrenalin peaks, you watch wide-eyed as a wild polar bear stalks across the frozen tundra deep in the Canadian wilderness."²³² Several tour operators declare that the polar bear tourism experience is simply powerful, unique, and unforgettable: responsibletravel.com asserts that travelling by tundra vehicle "provides a wonderful opportunity for a close-up encounter never to be forgotten"²³³; and the Great Canadian Travel Company insists that "[w]itnessing the migration of the 'King of the Arctic' is truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience".²³⁴ In this way, the tour operators' authority, along with the certainty of their claims, legitimize the various constructions of polar bears and normalize particular human-polar bear interactions.

5.3 Responsibility toward the Natural Environment

The texts analyzed in this study often display a concern about the well-being of the "natural resources" on which they rely for their operations. Some tour operators communicate this as a relationship with and connection to the "wildlife" and *its* natural habitat, as illustrated in the following passages: Sea North Tours states that it is "a family owned company evolved from a love of the subarctic and its wildlife"²³⁵; Frontiers North Adventures describes its foundation as an "unwavering passion for Canada's North"²³⁶ and explains that the company specializes in this region "because that's where we're from and that's what we're passionate about"²³⁷; and

Natural Habitat Adventures insists that it is a carbon-neutral travel company because “[w]e all care about the planet”.²³⁸ This care also manifests as a concern for the tundra environment and its inhabitants: tour operators often emphasize their commitment to environmentally sustainable philosophies and practices. The resolution to protect and preserve the environment is communicated through some kind of statement of stewardship or promise of responsibility: Churchill Wild, for example, insists that it is “devoted to minimizing [its] environmental footprint” and has “developed systems and procedures to accomplish this”²³⁹; Cregor Adventures “believes in supporting environmental organizations that preserve these special places for generations to come” and invites the audience “to consider supporting them as well”²⁴⁰; responsibletravel.com claims to be the “[f]irst business in the world to talk about responsible travel, and first dedicated to promoting ‘green’, ‘eco’ or ‘responsible’ holidays on one site”²⁴¹; Wat’chee Expeditions declares its support for “the need to protect the health and integrity of the ecosystems”²⁴² in which it operates; and the Churchill Northern Studies Centre states that its vision is “to understand and sustain the north”.²⁴³

A number of tour operators—as is evident in the above passages—associate themselves with the increasingly popular institutions of sustainable, responsible, and ecotourism. Churchill Wild, for example, calls itself a proud supporter and member of the International Ecotourism Society—a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting ecotourism—featuring the organization’s logo on its website.²⁴⁴ Similarly, Churchill Nature Tours declares its “[e]xcellence in Ecotourism since 1985.”²⁴⁵ Perhaps most obviously, responsibletravel.com identifies with the well-established notion of responsible tourism by incorporating it directly into its name. Increasingly, sustainability is of paramount concern to the tourism industry. Several reasons

make this especially true for the Arctic region, such as the sensitivity of the natural environment and the pressures of Western societies on cultural traditions of the Aboriginal communities of the North (Berman, Nicolson, Kofinas, Tetlich, & Martin, 2004). It seems that associating with the philosophies and practices of the sustainable and responsible tourism movement helps the tour operators analyzed in this study to communicate their care and concern for the natural environment more obviously. Additionally, these companies frequently refer to their expedition leaders and guides as “naturalists,” conveying a commitment to natural history and the understanding of the natural environment and its inhabitants.

In considerations of responsibility and sustainability, the preservation of the *natural environment* is generally the point of concern for tour operators. It is likely that animals are considered an implicit part of the “environment”, and so any action taken to preserve the natural environment also displays a care about the animals who dwell within it. Very few tour operators show direct concern for the well-being of *animals*. Churchill Wild, for example, states that it restricts the use of motorized vehicles “[o]ut of respect for both the wildlife and the sensitive ecosystem they depend on”.²⁴⁶ Diverging from the common narrative of “pursuit” or “search” for polar bears, the company also informs the audience that “[b]ears and other wild creatures are allowed to approach on their own terms – we do not pursue or pressure them.”²⁴⁷ Similarly, Wat’chee Expeditions explains that during its tours, a viewing site will be vacated because “[e]ither the client group or the bears will desire to leave the area. The clients to experience another adventure and the bears for privacy.”²⁴⁸ These passages indicate some sort of concern or respect for the well-being of the animals involved in the touristic experiences, acknowledging an animal’s own agency or desire for privacy.

For the most part, however, the safety and well-being of the individual bears are not mentioned (much less emphasized) by the tourism industry. Moreover, there is an absence of a discussion of the potential ethical issues related to the touristic pursuit, observation, and filming/photographing of polar bears. While some tour operators claim to avoid interrupting polar bears during tours (for example, Churchill Wild aims to “observe animals without interrupting their normal activities”²⁴⁹), others expressly insist that these animals are not at all disturbed or interrupted by tourism activities. Natural Habitat Adventures, for instance, counters the possibility of a disturbance to polar bears by persuading the audience that there are no concerns about the impacts of the company’s activities on the bears. In a webinar titled “Conserving Polar Bears in the Arctic”, the tour operator’s “expedition leader and staff naturalist” (Eric Rock) informs the audience that “the bears have become tolerant of the vehicles and in many cases their day isn’t even really interrupted by the presence of the Polar Rovers”, especially because “the drivers know how to maneuver the vehicles for the best possible viewing and photography and [to] not influence the bears in a negative fashion.”²⁵⁰ When asked about the possibility of helicopter tours posing a disturbance to bears, the Natural Habitat Adventures representative responds that

a lot of the time they’re flying at a thousand feet of elevation, maybe, so a lot of times the bears don’t even pay any attention to helicopters flying over at that elevation. And if they do happen to show any reaction to the helicopter, the helicopter pilots are really good at pulling away right at that point so the bears aren’t disturbed any more than what they were at the initial overflight. There are occasions when a bear might be surprised by

a helicopter coming overhead as it's maybe making a landing somewhere toward one of the polar bear dens, but the idea is not to change their behaviour in any way.²⁵¹

These statements imply that the tour operator takes the well-being of the animals on whom it relies into consideration, and consequently that there is no reason for the audience to be concerned about possible impacts of the tourism activities on polar bears. A similar message is advanced in an NBC video featured on the Heartland International Travel & Tours website, in which the newscaster (Mary Carillo) visits Churchill and rides aboard the Tundra Buggy. In this video, the newscaster asks a Tundra Buggy staff member "What do [polar bears] think of us?" to which the individual replies

Well, they don't really think much of us, you know? We don't offer them any food value. We're not providing them an opportunity to pass on their genes, and after a while we're just like a tree or a rock, you know?²⁵²

Following this exchange, the newscaster narrates that "while the bears might be *underwhelmed* by us, seeing these powerful animals in the wild is a breathtaking experience" (emphasis added).²⁵³

The denial of any negative impacts of tourism activities, along with the narratives of concern for the well-being of polar bears and their natural habitat, discipline the audience to trust the tourism industry's claims of responsibility and not question the operators' actions. These narratives—socially powerful and convincing because they are based on the Western scientific tradition as well as locally authenticated experience and knowledge—suggest that there is no reason for tourists to be conflicted about their own presence in the bears' environment, nor to be conflicted about the industry's preoccupation with getting tourists "as

close as possible” to polar bears. In addition, the discourse of commitment to the species and their environment legitimizes visions of polar bears as tourism “resources”, there to be used and consumed as part of the “tundra spectacle.” According to this discourse, caring about the animals endows people with the responsibility and duty to learn about them and to share their impressions and knowledge with the rest of the world, with those who do not have the rare privilege to experience the Churchill polar bears firsthand. Thus when tourists venture into the tundra, they supposedly do so for a deeper understanding of the species and their home and out of respect for, and a sense of responsibility toward them. This discourse works to persuade the audience that tourism presence in the tundra, and the continued pursuit of polar bears, is justified by the tourists’ (and the guides’) good intentions. According to the texts analyzed in this study, the bears also recognize these caring and genuine intentions, accepting and even welcoming the presence of tourists by “teaching” and “performing” for them. This notion is evident in a Natural Habitat Adventures webinar (titled “Conserving Polar Bears in the Arctic”), in which an expedition leader states

the one creature that has probably shared more with me about Arctic environments and their behaviour is the polar bear itself. So I have to give a big thank you to the polar bear for all the different lessons it’s taught me over the years and all of these opportunities to travel with it.²⁵⁴

Similarly, the Churchill Northern Studies Centre explains that on one of its educational tours, “Not only will you get to observe polar bears in their natural environment, but as a ‘researcher for a day’ you will contribute directly to our understanding of these magnificent animals.”²⁵⁵ Thus, the notion that the tourism industry and its clients all care about and desire to better

understand polar bears and their habitat legitimizes the journey to Churchill for the tundra experience, in which polar bears are used not only to fulfil the “wildlife” viewing demands of the spectators but also serve as “educational resources.”

CHAPTER 6: SOCIAL EFFECTS

Eight prominent constructions of polar bears have emerged from this analysis (as discussed in Chapter 4): powerful, majestic and masculine bear; bear as figure in and of Canadian wilderness; silly, social polar bear; inquisitive polar bear; fascinating, magical, and awe-inspiring polar bear; female polar bear as figure of motherhood; polar bear as resource; and polar bear as performer in the tundra spectacle. It is important to note that tourism promotional materials rarely rely on one singular construction to portray polar bears. Instead, different aspects of the bears are emphasized at various times to achieve particular ends. Because no one text exists on its own but operates alongside other texts and discourses, polar bears come to embody all of these dominant characteristics at once, though one “facet” of the animal may be emphasized over another in a particular passage.

While at first glance these portrayals may appear oddly muddled and inconsistent, I observe a coherency among them. The first six constructions listed above construe—even push—a particular “nature” of “the polar bear” to help build and maintain the fascination with and mystique surrounding this animal: he is portrayed as a powerful, regal, and somewhat magical creature who embodies the wilderness spirit of the Canadian North. At the same time, the aggressive and predatory natures of the bear are downplayed, I imagine to avoid stirring up feelings of fright or revulsion in the audience. Instead, traits that are typically more appealing and effective at forging a connection between humans and other animals, such as playfulness and an almost childlike inquisitiveness, are emphasized. To fortify the construction of the polar bear as a friendly and unimposing animal, the image of motherhood and the maternal bond between a mother and her cub(s) is invoked. However, this “feminine” construction (explored in

more detail in Section 6.5) seems to portray and represent a different polar bear, one whose qualities make her distinct from the dominant masculine polar bear described above.

The constructions of polar bears as natural resources and as performers in the tundra spectacle, on the other hand, seem almost “unintentional” in that they do not depict particular “natures” or “qualities” of bears that are emphasized to help sell the tourism product to the audience. I interpret them as a direct reflection of the relationship between human beings and polar bears: these constructions, along with the texts and discourses of which they are a part, radiate an instrumentalist perspective toward animals that is perhaps impossible to conceal as “the devaluation of other-than-human animals is an inescapable aspect of the English language” (Kheel, 2008, p. 6). Relating to animals as instruments of human beings—as “resources,” “entertainers,” or the myriad other uses or “purposes” of animals in Western patriarchal society—functions strategically to justify and reinforce their exploitation.

In this section, I explore the social effects of the constructions of polar bears and the dominant discourses of polar bear tourism that maintain and legitimize them. I address the question “How are social inequality, power abuse, and domination of polar bears reproduced or resisted in discourses of polar bear tourism?” In particular, I explore the relationship between human beings and polar bears that the discourses of polar bear tourism seem to support and encourage. My thinking is conscientiously informed by ecofeminist philosophy, especially when exploring the extent to which discourses of tourism support, recreate, or resist a gendered exploitation of polar bears. However, the contributions of ecofeminism are not limited to Section 6.5: Gendered Exploitation; this chapter, in its entirety, benefits greatly from the insights of ecofeminism.

6.1 Tourism, Patriarchy, and Dualistic Thought

The findings of my analysis suggest that the tourism industry reflects dichotomous thinking that is characteristic of patriarchal society. As Kheel (1996a) explains, “Western dualistic thought sees the world in terms of static polarities – ‘us and them,’ ‘subject and object,’ ‘superior and inferior,’ ‘mind and body,’ ‘animate and inanimate,’ ‘reason and emotion,’ ‘culture and nature’” (p. 18). Embedded in the “culture and nature” dualism is the dichotomy between human beings and other-than-human animals (Gaard, 2002). Ecofeminist thinkers insist that such dualistic thinking sustains a system of domination that has led to the brutal exploitation of many oppressed groups, including other-than-human animals and all of nature (Kheel, 1996a). Generally speaking, dualism involves making a distinction between two different “realms” or “kinds of things” (Moyer, 2001). However, the dualisms of patriarchy, also referred to as normative dualisms, are constructed such that members of a pair are separated and one member is deemed more valuable than the other (Plumwood, 1993). The more valued half is seen as a “male” and “human” subject (Kheel, 1996a, p. 18) while the less valued or subordinate half is considered a “female” and “natural” object (Kheel, 1996a, p. 18) and “closer to nature” (Gaard, 1997, p. 119).

Adams (1994) refers to this ordering as a value-hierarchy. The subordinate or devalued groups in these dualisms are all associated with one another and with similar qualities to justify their domination and reinforce their oppression (Warren, 2000). For example,

the association of African Americans with animals has been used to legitimate enslaving both groups, the association of women with animals was used as an additional factor in

legitimizing three centuries of witch burnings, and the association of indigenous people with animal sexuality was used to legitimate colonialism. (Gaard, 2002, pp. 132-3)

The subordination of other-than-human animals, therefore, is connected to and reinforces other forms of oppression such as racism and sexism (Warren, 2000).

The tourism industry reinforces this “value-hierarchy” through dichotomous thinking. A persistent theme coursing through the discourses of polar bear tourism is the masculinization of polar bears as figures of and in wilderness, maintained in large part by the vision of nature as a wilderness landscape. The wilderness idea perpetuates the “myth that ‘man’ exists apart from nature” (Callicot, 2002, p. 176) rather than belonging to and in the “natural world.” Essential to this separation of man from nature is the vision of the natural environment as a pristine, untouched, unpeopled place. Wilderness landscapes are not spaces for human habitation, but are “delicately balanced ecosystems that need to be preserved for our enjoyment and use and that of future generations” (Gomez-Pompa & Kaus, 1992, pp. 271-2) and in which “recreation is the only legitimate activity” (Simon & Alagona, 2009, p. 26). The presence of human beings in the wilderness is thus transient, while other-than-human animals belong and are part of the natural environment.

Such a relationship between human beings and nature reflects dichotomous thinking as human beings are positioned separate from and outside of nature. A value-hierarchy is established between the two realms in which “human” is elevated above “nature” and all it is perceived to encompass (including plant-life and other-than-human animals). Within this order, other-than-human animals are viewed as inferior to human beings, and, in keeping with the “subject/object” and “animate/inanimate” dualisms underlying Western culture (Plumwood,

1993), are treated as mere objects. This is evident in the language of tourism promotion: terms such as “it” and “that” are exclusively employed to refer to polar bears instead of “he,” “she,” or “who.” Since the terms “it” and “that” are typically reserved in the English language for inanimate objects or things, their use in identifying polar bears reflects the ordering of animals (humans included) in the value-hierarchy. When referring to other-than-human animals, terms such as “it” and “that” “fail to respect subjective identity” (Kheel, 2008, p. 7).

Not only are animals scripted as being of lesser “value” or “worth,” they are also *in service* to human beings: as part of the dualisms of patriarchy, women serve men, nature serves culture, animals serve humans (Adams, 1993). This encourages and justifies the use and domination of animals and the rest of the natural world (Adams, 1993). The instrumental relationship humans have to and with other animals is quite obvious given the widespread “expectations that we can eat, wear, experiment upon, or constrain animals to provide entertainment for us at circuses or zoos” (Adams & Procter-Smith, 1993, p. 310). The tourism industry relies heavily on animals and they continue to be used in a variety of ways and contexts: they are eaten, fished, hunted, ridden, harnessed, and watched in “free-range” settings (such as polar bear viewing tours) or as captives in zoos, circuses, and other events like rodeos, cockfights, and horse and greyhound races (Fennell, 2012a).

6.2 Relationships of Use: Objectification and Commodification of Polar Bears

While the circumstances of use may differ among the examples of tourism practices involving other-than-human animals noted above, the treatment of animals as tourism *resources* or *commodities* is ubiquitous. Commodification is the process by which something that has a “use-value” but not an economic value is assigned such a value, and its worth is converted into

its “exchange value” in market (Marx, 1844, 1867, as cited in Wearing, McDonald, & Ponting, 2005, p. 428). It is a deeply embedded element of Western society and a startling reflection of the dominant Western environmental paradigm—the way human beings envision their place in the “natural world” (Weaver, 2008). As Weaver (2008) explains, this dominant perception is anthropocentric, or human-centered. Humans are separate from and superior to nature. The natural environment is perceived as a resource with no intrinsic value, and so is treated as a commodity to be exploited (Weaver, 2008). Under the Western environmental paradigm, all aspects of life become commodities, and relationships are transformed into commercial relationships (Wearing et al., 2005). Goods, services, experiences, culture, nature, people and animals are turned into objects that are used, exchanged, or consumed for profit in the market place (Wearing et al., 2005).

In a similar fashion, polar bears are commodified by the tourism industry, treated as resources or supplies that can and should be used for human benefit in the tourism context. Especially during the fall months, they are the primary “attractions” in Churchill, used and promoted by the tourism industry for profit. As representative symbols of the Canadian wilderness, polar bears are packaged as part of an “authentic Northern experience” to be purchased and consumed by tourists. In the town of Churchill, the iconic status of polar bears and their importance to local and national identity are reinforced through physical reminders: recreations of polar bears in the forms of statues (Figure 43) and signs (Figure 44), or displays of once-living animals (Figure 45), are impossible to miss. The official tourism website of the town of Churchill confirms that “Polar bears are everywhere – on murals, signs, souvenirs, and sculptures – and the live version occasionally wanders in to town as well!”²⁵⁶ Thus, polar bears as

inanimate physical objects are positioned strategically throughout the town of Churchill, and the animal him or herself becomes merely the “live version” of these displays.

Polar bears are also commodified and turned into tangible objects through merchandising. Merchandising relies on iconic animals—those who are particularly alluring, fascinating, or threatened with extinction—because these images are incorporated into the merchandise items and the final commodities are tangible representations of the animals as we perceive them (Beardsworth & Bryman, 2001). Polar bears are merchandized extensively, the tourism industry capitalizing on the fact that these animals, as human beings have constructed them, function superbly as icons. Great White Bear Tours invites tourists to “[c]ome in and shop at our Gift Store, we have many items for purchase that reflect the unique nature of our community and if it has a polar bear on it, we sell it.”²⁵⁷ I observed this abundant



Figure 43. Statue of two polar bears in front of the Visitor Information Centre in the Town of Churchill. Photographed by Olga Yudina.



Figure 44. A sign for Gypsy's Bakery & Restaurant in the shape of a polar bear. Photographed by Olga Yudina.



Figure 45. A display of a once-living polar bear in Churchill Airport. Photographed by Olga Yudina.

merchandizing during my stay in Churchill: polar bears are reproduced through a wide variety of souvenirs, including (but not limited to) sculptures, clothing (Figure 46), toys (Figure 47), and glassware (Figure 48). The merchandizing process turns polar bears into collectibles or memorabilia, objects or materials purchased by tourists during their Churchill tourism experience.

Polar bears are also commodified through the “watching” or “viewing” experience during which they become objects of fascination and admiration. As discussed in Section 4.5, polar bears are constructed as powerfully attractive and captivating animals, an allure that is emphasized by the tourism industry to maintain the bear’s iconic status. Yudina and Fennell (2013) contend that the fascination with iconic animals turns them into treasures, “robbing them of their beingness and rendering them objects of our admiration” (p. 62). Such objectification is blatantly evident in a passage from the Churchill Northern Studies Centre in which the organization promotes one of its “learning vacations”:



Figure 46. A polar bear hat offered for sale at Great White Bear Gift Shop. Photographed by Olga Yudina.



Figure 47. Polar bear toys offered for sale at Wapusk General Store. Photographed by Olga Yudina.



Figure 48. Glasses offered for sale by the Arctic Trading Company, described as “Uncle Keith’s ‘Purified’ Polar Bear Piss. Brewed and Bottled at Arctic Trading Co. These glasses are made specifically for our store. They make a nice gift for the male in your life or a friend who likes a laugh now and then.”²⁵⁸

This program is packed with high-energy activities (kayak with the beluga whales), opportunities to get wet and muddy (comb the tidal flats of Hudson Bay for exotic marine life and 450 million year old fossils), adventure (travel back in time with a visit to the Hudson Bay Company's fur trade-era Prince of Wales Fort), and big shiny toys (view ptarmigan, fox, caribou – and maybe even a polar bear – from a giant custom made tundra vehicle). On second thought, the big shiny toys might be of more interest to the grown-ups.²⁵⁹

The animals identified in this text, although living, are indistinguishable from their inanimate, souvenir counterparts: they are all merely objects or toys whose “shine” or allure make them valuable tourism products.

As objects of interest, polar bears are pursued or sought by “wildlife enthusiasts” like deeply coveted treasures or trophies. The tourism industry promises an adventure during which the tourists, alongside their trusted guides, will comb the tundra in search of these prized animals. The bears become trophies that are acquired through photographs or by being “experienced” by the tourist. This is especially apparent in texts promoting photography-specific tours. Natural Habitat Adventures, for example, explains that because of the functionality of its tundra lodge, “photographers have plenty of space to shoot at will.”²⁶⁰ Cregor Adventures maintains that its tours provide expert guidance “on how best to capture the wonder of Arctic wildlife through the camera's lens”.²⁶¹ Similarly, a blog featured on the Frontiers North Adventures website recounts how an expert photographer “provided some tips and tricks to consider while capturing polar bears on snow”.²⁶² This language is not reserved for polar bears: a representative of Churchill Wild (Mike Reimer) explains on the company's website that

thousands of caribou were observed near one of the lodges, and that “[t]hese photogenic creatures provided many bonus hours of ‘shooting.’”²⁶³ These and other similar texts are reminiscent of hunting discourse: the animals are “pursued” or “sought” and subsequently “shot” or “captured.”

The language of “pursuit” and “capture” has possessive and consumptive undertones. While the viewing of free-roaming animals is generally positioned as a non-consumptive activity (unlike hunting), polar bears are consumed visually—a phenomenon referred to as “ocular consumption” (Lemelin, 2006). After observing and interviewing polar bear viewers in Churchill, Lemelin reports that tourists are often driven by the search for new collectables—in this case, photographs—and “this type of ocular consumption nurtures a constant need for bigger, better, and more exotic trophies” (p. 526). Thus, Lemelin (2006) suggests a “danger[...]for wildlife tourism to degrade into a gawk, a form of entertainment or a quest for collectables” (p. 531). This is a reflection of the instrumentalism that dominates the relationships between human beings and other animals in patriarchal society, in which animals are marginalized and objectified (Adams, 1996). Polar bears remain commodities in touristic encounters, and ocular consumption is yet another way of objectifying them.

Polar bears are also objectified and commodified as participants in the “tundra spectacle”: the tourism industry scripts the subjectivities of polar bears as performers, the tundra landscape as their stage, and the tourists as their audience. In this way, the entire touristic experience, including the encounters between polar bears and tourists, is mediated or “staged” by the industry and the various discourses of polar bear tourism. This staging and exhibition reflects a long-standing tradition of the use of animals as entertainers of human

beings in settings such as zoos, safari parks, aquariums, circuses, and street performances.

Although polar bear viewing involves encounters with “free-roaming” animals in their natural habitat as opposed to confined animals in an obviously captive setting, the logic of domination is consistent. The common denominator to all animal-centered tourism activities, Hughes (2001) argues, is that they relate to animals as objects rather than subjects, and so the animals are also manipulated like objects. Just as a zoo is a “repository of living objects with cultural value” (Mason, 2011, p. 192), the tundra becomes a collection of “big shiny toys” (CNSC)²⁶⁴ that tourists have purchased the right to consume. Much like displays of animals in cages, staged performances attempt to reaffirm that human beings are superior to and distinct from other animals (Desmond, 1999). Citing the research of Bentrupperbaumer (2005), Kellert (1996), and Orams (2002), Kontogeorgopoulos (2009) argues that the “dominionistic view, which sees animals as under the dominion of human beings, emphasises mastery, domination, and control of animals[...]currently prevails in the wildlife tourism industry” while the “utilitarian view, [which] values animals only for their ability to provide concrete social, economic, or psychological benefits to humans” (p. 430) is also common. Thus, the treatment of animals as means to human ends in the polar bear viewing industry parallels the oppressive relationships between human beings and animals in other animal-reliant tourism activities.

6.3 Marginalization of Polar Bears’ Experiences

As part of the discourse of instrumentalism, polar bears are marginalized, their subjective experiences and their needs treated as insignificant or peripheral to that of human beings. The perspective of the human being is privileged in tourism promotional materials: the texts analyzed in this study primarily disregard the consciousness of the other animals involved in the

encounter. Instead, the needs and desires of tourists are emphasized and addressed, such as those for comfort and safety, close and entertaining encounters with polar bears, and photographic opportunities to obtain the “perfect shots.” Treated as mere objects that exist for human benefit and the fulfillment of tourist fantasies, polar bears are stripped of any sense of agency. This is consistent with the treatment of animals in Western society: “animals are seen as having no individuality, no significant life-plan, no preferences, and, ultimately, no real concerns” (Vance, 1995, p. 168). This is accomplished by denying animal subjectivity. Luke (1996) explains that

Today some people call other living creatures “livestock,” “game,” “pets,” “laboratory animals,” “meat,” and so forth and in doing so they deny the animals’ own subjectivity. Projecting human uses for these animals into their definitional essences[...]block[s] our awareness that other animals have interests of their own that are systematically overridden (p. 95)

The polar bear viewing industry promotes the message that polar bears, regardless of how they are constructed, exist to be viewed and photographed. The Churchill Wildlife Management Area website, for example, promotes the viewing of polar bears under the category “Watchable Wildlife” (Manitoba Conservation, n.d., “Watchable Wildlife”). Just as polar bears are “edible” to those who hunt and/or eat them, they are “watchable” resources to those who consume them visually. The effect is thus the same as with human relationships with animals used for other purposes. For example, “the ontologizing of animals as edible bodies creates them as instruments of human beings; animals’ lives are thus subordinated to the human’s desire to eat

them” (Adams, 1991, p. 138). In much the same way, polar bears are viewed as “watchable bodies” that are used to enhance touristic experiences and fulfil tourist desires.

The lived experiences of polar bears are either rendered nonexistent in the touristic encounters between tourists and bears (by not being addressed at all), or they are carefully scripted (with a powerfully anthropocentric intent) for the tourism context. Polar bears are often constructed as willing participants and eager performers in the tourism experience of the “tundra spectacle” (see Section 4.8). Luke (1996) notes that “[a]pparently the mere erasure of animal subjectivity is not sufficient to allow us to accept the harms done to animals—in each of the exploitation industries we see a definite construction of the animals as *willing victims*” (original emphasis, p. 96). This is characteristic of the tourism industry as well: promotional materials, for example, often suggest that polar bears engage in a meaningful two-way exchange with tourists through eye contact. Closer analysis of the texts, however, reveals this as nothing more than a promotional tool employed to emphasize the sales feature of “close range encounters” with “wild polar bears.” Thus the experience and the gaze of the polar bear are engaged disingenuously and once again for human benefit rather than to acknowledge the subjective experience of the particular animal.

There are several other examples of this type of “disengagement” with the experiences of other animals in the tourism promotional materials: Natural Habitat Adventures, for instance, offers tourists “a chance to enter a [vacant] polar bear den”.²⁶⁵ The company explains that this “chance to fly over the vast expanse of the tundra, make a wilderness landing and crawl inside an unoccupied polar bear den” constitutes “the rarest of polar bear experiences”.²⁶⁶ While this experience could potentially offer an individual the opportunity to imagine the lived and

experienced realities of a polar bear mother and her newborn cub(s), it is not constructed or encouraged in such terms. The text does not support such engagement with the bear's realities, especially when considered in the context of other dominant discourses circulating in the promotional materials. Natural Habitat Adventures elaborates that this experience, when added to the "unique opportunity for an in-depth experience of the lives of northern peoples", constitutes "an Arctic adventure experienced by very few."²⁶⁷ Rarity, uniqueness, and exclusivity are emphasized, while the possibility of connecting with the life of another animal is completely disregarded.

Another anthropocentrically scripted version of a polar bear's experience is evident in the notion of "role reversal": on several occasions, the experience of the tourist is likened to that of an animal in a zoo. Churchill Wild, for example, states that "[w]ith bears coming right up to the fence, you are as close as three feet away. You get the feeling that you are the zoo attraction and they are the spectator."²⁶⁸ A similar sentiment is expressed in several news articles featured on the Churchill Wild website. While these are not directly promotional materials of the polar bear viewing industry, they are relevant as they are made readily available to the audience by the tour operator. Moreover, these materials help to explore how the constructions of polar bears and the discourses that support them operate across a variety of texts. In a 2012 article featured in *The Globe and Mail*, Jake Macdonald, a previous guest of one of the lodges of Churchill Wild, writes:

the lodge is surrounded by chain-link fencing, and we can't help feeling that the bears are the observers and we're the exhibits. Which is okay because this zoo feeds its inmates well. Shortly after our arrival, Riley announces that lunch is served. "We use local food as

much as possible,” he says. “The jelly is made from cloudberry we pick right outside the lodge, and the caribou stew is from choice animals we harvest every year.”

Similarly, a 2011 article in *The Independent*, written by an anonymous visitor, states:

It's a thrilling moment: wall-to-wall wilderness, with just us and – a few paces away – the world's largest terrestrial predator. On such occasions, it is us who feel like the captive exhibits. But the lodge makes a delightful zoo. Inside, safe from inquisitive bears, wild weather and ravenous mosquitoes, we enjoy fabulous food – caribou wellington, blueberry muffins, snow goose casserole with wild rice – all prepared from treasured family recipes using tundra ingredients.

In these examples, the tourists are scripted as the “zoo exhibits” while the free-roaming polar bears are the “spectators.” The experiences of imprisoned animals are completely trivialized, conveyed in a positive and humorous tone by infusing the notions of willingness and enjoyment into the bears’ experiences. The suggestion that the lives of animals in captivity are in any way the same or similar to the leisure experiences of tourists at tundra lodges is abhorrent and cruelly dismissive of the realities of imprisoned animals. At the same time, the suggestion that the experiences of free-roaming polar bears in the tundra environment are comparable to those of human beings who visit captive establishments such as zoos is suspect as it ignores the possible realities of constantly being pursued, looked at, and photographed.

An alternative construction of polar bears, one that resists the marginalization of polar bears and attempts to construe their realities, can be found in the work of Mark Reynolds, a resident of Churchill. Reynolds operates a souvenir stand in the Churchill Airport called “Here Be Bears”. According to the Here Be Bears website, he “specialize[s] in carvings, jewelry, and glass

work and mainly in a Northern Canadian wildlife theme”.²⁶⁹

Reynolds offers a postcard (Figure 49) titled “Journey from Churchill” that depicts an image of “Assinine Park Zoo” that he created as a response to Assiniboine Park Zoo’s new captive bear exhibit called

“Journey to Churchill.” He explains on the back of the postcard that the print was “Awarded 2nd place in the Drawing & Printmaking Category, as well as People’s Choice, in the 37th annual Northern Juried Art Show held, this year, in Churchill.” It was subsequently banned “from inclusion in the 11th Annual Rural and Northern Art Show, by The

Assiniboine Park Conservatory/Zoo”. Reynolds explains on the back of the postcard that “[t]his print has now become as much about freedom of expression, as it once was about the freedom of polar bears and the use of the word ‘Churchill’, by the Zoo, to sell captive polar bears.” This concern for the realities of the polar bears imprisoned for human entertainment shows a dissent

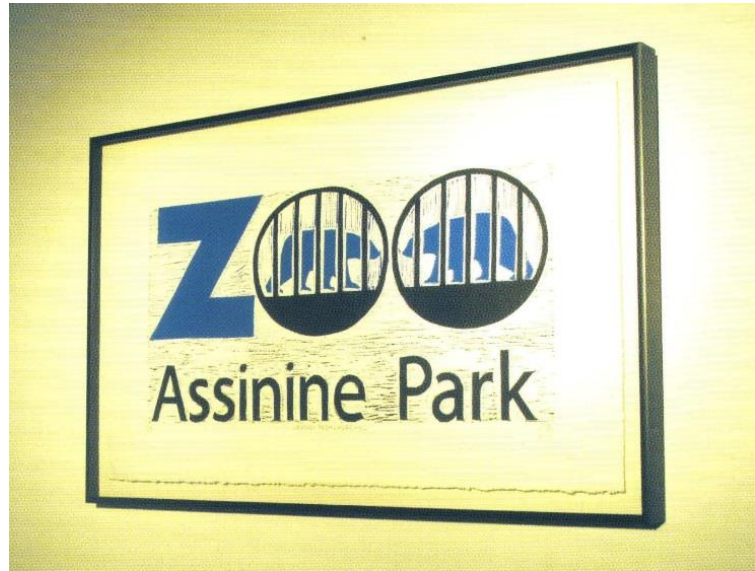


Figure 49. Postcard created by Mark Reynolds and purchased at Here Be Bears.

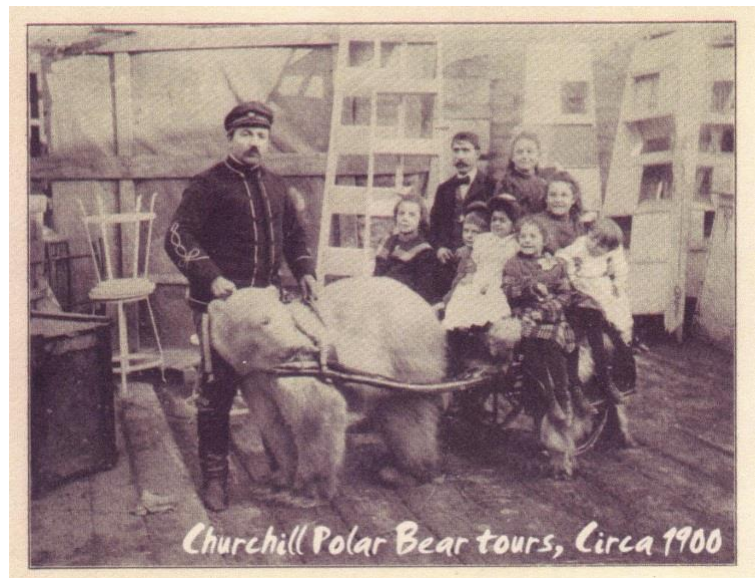


Figure 50. Postcard offered for sale by Mark Reynolds at Here Be Bears.

from the dominant discourses of tourism as well as the pervasive instrumentalism that dominates human relationships with other animals in Western society.

Reynolds offers other postcards (Figures 50 and 51) that portray the often-concealed aspects of human-polar bear relationships in the tourism context. A



Figure 51. Postcard offered for sale by Mark Reynolds at Here Be Bears.

number of the images he incorporates

into his work depict polar bears in subservient positions, highlighting the unequal relationship of power that exists between human beings and polar bears. Figures 50 and 51, for example, both display the bear as a servant of his or her human “master.” Although I cannot speak to the purpose or intent of these images, I interpret their effect as one that disturbs the vision of peaceful symbiosis that pervades other promotional materials. Rather than construe human beings and polar bears in a kind of harmony, Reynolds’ postcards explicitly display polar bears in circumstances and roles that, to me, are distressing and painful. It is my hope that these images encourage the audience to face their discomfort by reflecting on the use of polar bears for human benefit. Unfortunately, this type of critical portrayal does not appear often in the texts of the tourism industry and is not embraced or encouraged in tourism promotional materials.

6.4 The Scientific Tradition of Knowing

The tourism industry often relies on the “scientific tradition of knowing” to “understand” and “interpret” polar bears. Several tour operators boldly associate themselves with science-

oriented organizations such as Polar Bears International, the World Wildlife Fund, and the Churchill Northern Studies Centre, and the relationships between human beings and polar bears are negotiated with scientific knowledge (see Section 5.2). The privileging, in Western science, of a particular way of knowing “raises many questions about who constructs knowledge and in what context” (Birke, 1995, p. 40). Science embraces and reinforces the dualisms of patriarchal society such as male/female, human/nature, human/other-than-human animal, reason/emotion, and subject/object. It invokes a separation of intellect from emotion to present a “rational” discourse (Bulbeck, 2005) and adopts an objectivity that “denies dependency and kinship between observer and observed” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 123). Plumwood (1993) maintains that the “style” of science and technology “heavily involves the highly valorised traits of objectivity, abstractness, rationality and suppression of emotionality” and their “function” “exhibits most strongly the virtues of transcendence of, control of and struggle with nature”, such that these areas “are strongly marked for elite men” (p. 28). Although this tradition has achieved widespread acceptance, it is certainly not the only way of understanding the world: Bulbeck (2005), for example, explains that unlike the “reductionist and mechanistic” nature of Western science, “the blending of science with Shintoism makes the Japanese approach less dualistic, less calculative, [and] more emotional” (p. 191).

In the Western scientific tradition, animals—who are implicitly a part of “nature”—are viewed and treated as “objects of inquiry” (Birke, 1995, p. 36), reflecting the kind of interspecies relationship that is also promoted by the polar bear viewing industry. This “mechanistic conception of animals[...]fails to recognise animals adequately either as sociocultural beings, as agents in their own lives, or as others whose being outruns our knowledge” (Plumwood, 1993, p.

122). This perspective on and treatment of animals is also characteristic of other animal-reliant tourism establishments: “zoo research often adopts the values of science, including objectification—‘non-human nature is seen largely as an object for human use and benefit’—and reductionism, breaking nature down into ‘sets of knowable or observable elements and events’” (Mazur, 2001, p. 75 as cited in Bulbeck, 2005, p. 200). Alongside this objectification, the lived experiences of animals are marginalized through the logic of science: “The behavior of all nonhuman species”, explains (1995) Birke, “is relegated to the catch-all category of biology. So, everything about animals—including their behaviour—is biological” (p. 37). This assumption that animals are “nothing but biology” leads to the conclusion that their behaviour is “determined” and “fixed” (p. 39). Birke asserts that, as a result, “We know very little in practice about how differences emerge in animals out of their social interactions/experiences” (p. 39). The reduction of animals to the “biological” works to deny animal subjectivity, neglecting the experiences of animals and the dynamic complexities of their personal and social lives.

The scientific tradition also encompasses approaches that are not reductionist in nature. Ecology, for example, “works in the opposite direction of the reductionist ethos of other natural sciences, which start from the smallest element” (Bulbeck, 2005, p. 160). It is “a holistic approach” that attempts “to explain organisms in the context of their environment” (Bulbeck, 2005, p. 160). With the rise of ecology and the concept of “ecosystem,” “ecologists could recognize and then argue for the balance of species” (Bulbeck, 2005, p. 160). This emphasis on “species” is a shared characteristic of the various dominant scientific approaches, even those that employ a reductionist logic and work with “individual” animals. As Birke (1995) explains, “In most studies of animal behavior it is groups that are important. In field studies, the focus is often

on the social group and its dynamics; in the laboratory, what usually is studied is animals as representative groups” (p. 40). Generally speaking, then, science treats animals as “exemplars of particular species”, denying the “emotion or feelings” of the individual (p. 40).

This emphasis on the well-being of the ecosystem or species is evident in the texts analyzed in this study. Care and concern for individual bears are largely overlooked by the industry, replaced by the discourse of responsibility for the natural environment as a whole (see Section 5.3). Tours of Exploration, for instance, runs an “ECOFund” that the company explains “was created to help support conservation projects in the destinations that we are privileged to visit. We encourage active involvement in the preservation of these often fragile and pristine areas.”²⁷⁰ Such attention to “larger wholes” coexists with inattention to individual animals in discourses of tourism. The tourism industry portrays the polar bears of the Western Hudson Bay area as a special and unique “species” or “population.” As Kheel (2008) explains,

The tendency to view other-than-human animals as aggregate categories, rather than individuals, is built into our language. Thus, those that are undomesticated are collectively known as “wildlife.” Similarly, large numbers of individual animals are routinely referred to with the use of singular words, such as “deer” or “buffalo,” blurring the distinction between individuals and species. (p. 7)

Reflecting this perspective, polar bears are often portrayed as a unit or group, referred to as “wildlife,” “wild life-forms,” “wild things,” “fauna,” and “megafauna” (see Section 4.7). This species-level thinking is more abstract, general, and disembodied (relative to attentiveness toward individuals), perhaps allowing people to feel comfortable with and/or naturalize bears as resources. Additionally, the particularities and individual lives of the animals within these groups

are blurred and de-emphasized at the expense of the “species,” perhaps to elevate the importance of the “whole” over its “individual parts.” Kheel (2008) argues that “[t]he concept of ‘species’ is a mental construct, akin to the notion of race” and that “[i]t is the living beings who matter, not the human abstractions” (p. 230). She maintains that while the species-level perspective “can help us understand the needs of individuals within[...]species[...]it cannot teach us empathy and understanding for individual beings” (p. 229). While environmentalists “operate in the big realm” and criticise the proponents of animal rights “for caring about ‘little things,’ like individuals and beings with feelings” (Davis, 1995, p. 202), Davis asks of them in return:

If, ecologically regarded, the concrete manifestations of existence are inconsequential, what substance does this realm possess? What are its contents and where do they reside exactly? Can the ecosphere be thus hollowed out without being converted to a shell? An ecologist once said in an interview that the individual life is a mere "blip on a grid" compared to the life process. Yet, it may be that there is no "life process" apart from the individual forms it assumes, whereby we infer it. The "process" is an inference, an abstraction, and while there is nothing wrong with generalizing and speculating on the basis of experience, to reify the unknown at the expense of the known shows a perversity of will. How is it possible, as the environmentalist asserts, to worry about "all the plants and creatures" of a system while managing to avoid caring about each and every one? Why would anyone *want* not to care? (original emphasis, pp. 202-3)

It is therefore important to attend to and concern ourselves with the “integrity” of individual animals as well as wholes (Kheel, 2008). Birke (1995) suggests that as a scientific approach, this “would require—among other things—creating a firmer dialogue between scientists and others

who work with animals—animal trainers, farmers, caretakers” as “[t]hese people often have a deep, intuitive understanding of the animals with whom they work” (p. 40). This represents an alternative way of “knowing” because it is “knowledge gained from working with individuals, knowing their idiosyncrasies and sustaining a dialogue with those animals, rather than from standing outside and studying animals in groups.” (Birke, 1995 p. 40). Unfortunately, “This knowledge typically is denied by the formal practice of science” (Birke, 1995, p. 40).

During my stay in Churchill, I attended a number of lectures and presentations arranged for tourist groups at the Churchill Northern Studies Centre. These were led by CNSC staff or guest researchers, many of whom specialized in the field of biology. Often, lecturers spoke passionately of efforts to “save” “the polar bear” or espoused their commitment to the “protection” and “preservation” of the species, presenting their understanding of polar bears’ biology, behaviours, reproductive cycles, mating habits, and so on. A variety of research approaches and techniques to the scientific study of polar bears was discussed, with an explanation of how these helped scientists to, for instance, assess the health of the individual animals and the species as a unit. As I participated in these lectures, I reflected on a remark made by Kheel (2008) that “[m]any see no contradiction in killing wolves in order to save ‘the wolf,’ or experimenting on animals in order to make the environment ‘safe’” (p. 2). Although the context of Kheel’s observation differed from one in which I was immersed as a researcher/polar bear viewing tourist, I felt an immediate connection to her sentiment: it seemed to me that much of the research about which I was hearing was justified by its perceived benefit to “the polar bear,” while the effect or meaning of this invasiveness on/for the individual animal was ignored or minimized as an unavoidable peripheral element. I found myself struggling to

reconcile my own ethical perspective on the treatment of other-than-human animals (which closely reflects ecofeminism's animal ethics) with those of the speakers. I experienced a number of emotions as I listened and watched. It was distressing and painful, for example, to see images of sedated polar bears splayed across the tundra floor with researchers huddled around the animals' bodies to conduct their examinations, or photographs of polar bears confined to neck collars that were imposed on them for the purpose of tracking and monitoring their lives. I felt deeply dismayed that no one spoke of the concern for and preservation of dignities and integrities of the living beings on whom these scientific procedures were performed and whose privacies and freedoms were repeatedly violated. I was at once saddened and angered by the realization that this dimension of the research experience—one in which polar bears have individual voices and unique subjectivities—was silenced by rational scientific discourse and its social authority.

This type of thinking, with a focus on “human responsibility for the proper functioning (as defined by humans) of the whole of nature” justifies overlooking the “well-being of individuals who may be sacrificed for the whole” (Kheel, 2008, p. 229). Proponents of this “greater good” perspective view animals who are kept in captivity as representatives of or ambassadors for their species or habitat, supposedly used to educate the public, foster feelings of respect, and garner support for conservation initiatives (Gendron, 2004). The Churchill Northern Studies Centre, for example, enthusiastically supports the International Polar Bear Conservation Centre (IPBCC),²⁷¹ a facility that opened at Assiniboine Park Zoo in Winnipeg, Manitoba in January, 2012. The Conservation Centre is “a key component of the new Journey to Churchill exhibit”²⁷² which is scheduled to open in Assiniboine Park Zoo in July, 2014 and “will feature polar bears – as well as

other species – in three distinctive zones along the fascinating 10-acre route.”²⁷³ To support the Journey to Churchill exhibit, the IPBCC will house and transition “orphaned polar bear cubs found within the Polar Bear Alert Program Area control zones in northern Manitoba”, the largest of which is “the Polar Bear Alert area around Churchill, Manitoba.”²⁷⁴ According to the Assiniboine Park Zoo website,

If the cub is deemed to be a candidate for the transition program, it will be transported to the IPBCC, where it will be cared for and transitioned to life in a captive environment. Cubs will eventually be moved to other accredited facilities to act as ambassadors for Churchill, Manitoba, and the species.²⁷⁵

The individual and highly personal experience of captivity in such passages is either portrayed in a positive and light-hearted tone, or is minimized by accentuating the benefit of captivity to the greater good. Kheel (2008) argues that efforts to save endangered species illustrate a sense of omnipotence, a way of once again reaffirming the image of humans as the bearers of power. This does little to change our relationship with nature—it “merely perpetuates the same managerial ethos that brought ‘species’ to the brink of extinction in the first place” (Kheel, 2008, p. 230). Kheel (2008) explains that in programs meant to “save” and “protect” particular species, the lives of individual animals—their food, shelter, and sexuality—are manipulated and controlled by human beings. Although visitors may enjoy the idea of viewing animals in captivity to better understand the species, this is harmful to the individual animals whose freedoms are sacrificed (Kheel, 2008).

While many tour operators analyzed in this study do not mention animals in captivity in their promotional materials, they invoke the image of the captive animal by creating a stark

wild/captive opposition. Even when only one side of the dualism is mentioned, it summons the image of the other and implies a comparison between the two (see Section 4.2). Thus the tourism industry invokes the dichotomy between wild and captive animals by persistently emphasizing the “wildness” of the free-roaming polar bears of Churchill. The polarity between “wild” and “captive” becomes even more prominent when direct comparisons are made. For example, in a promotional video made by the Canadian Tourism Commission and showing footage aboard a Frontiers North Adventures’ Tundra Buggy, a staff member states that “it’s unbelievable, it doesn’t seem real. It’s not like viewing them in a zoo. They’re in their natural environment, they’re moving and doing what they naturally do”.²⁷⁶ This reinforces the notion that polar bears in captive environments like zoos lack an authenticity, naturalness and wildness that bears viewed in the tundra seem to embody. The animals of the tundra environment are thus ordered: the group termed “wildlife” is ranked higher in value than those who are removed and relegated to the group of “captives.” Although captive animals are supposedly “representatives” of their species in the wild—or so is advanced by zoos and other similar establishments to justify their displacement and imprisonment—these animals emerge as unworthy beings compared to their wild counterparts. As Bulbeck (2005) explains,

not only is Western philosophy shot through with dualist ways to carve up our understanding of the world, but the search for ‘authenticity’, and the spiritual yearning associated with this, may be a peculiar quest for contemporary industrialized Westerners. This desire makes it harder for us to give up the idea of untouched wilderness, of wild free animals. (p. 191)

In the context of polar bear viewing, the adoration of “wild” and “pure” bears and the simultaneous rejection of “captives” harms and cruelly misrepresents the realities of both free-roaming and imprisoned polar bears: while it denigrates the lives of polar bears in captivity, it ignores the fact that the “wild” bears of the Western Hudson Bay have been and continue to be tranquilized, tagged, probed, and monitored for scientific research, and that they continue to change and adapt in response to human development pressures and as habitat dynamics evolve and overlap. Bulbeck (2005) suggests that instead of searching for the “authentic” and “pristine,” we should “learn to love a manipulated nature, to value it as much as the imagined wilderness of our romantic dreams” (p. 191).

Unfortunately, the polar bears of the tundra are portrayed by the industry as inherently distinct from captive polar bears and their “manipulated nature.” As previously mentioned, the experiences of captive animals are devalued, trivialized, or altogether ignored. In Western society, explains Davis (1995), “Animals summoning forth images of things that are ‘unnatural, tame, and confined’ represent a way of life that western culture looks down upon” (p. 196). In this way, captive and domesticated animals find themselves on the same side of the dualism between the “wild” and the “tame.” Davis (1995) states that “domesticated, farm animals” “are disentitled to equal moral consideration with wild animals” because they “lack the behavioral repertoire and *élan vital* of wild animals” (p. 204). The existence of these animals is ignored and they are no longer seen as part of nature (Adams, 1991). Unlike captive bears, the “wild polar bear”—a representation of freedom and the authentic wild—is celebrated and revered in tourism promotional materials. As Kheel (2008) explains, the “feelings of love and respect for the larger whole” coexist “with a devaluation of ‘domestic’ animals and of all other-than-human

animals as individuals” (p. 231). In the context of this study, the polar bear species existing in the wild (where tourists view “it” as part of an authentic wilderness experience) is ranked higher on the value-hierarchy than the individual polar bears who have been removed from this environment and placed in a captive setting. The constructions of the natures and realities of these animals, on both sides of the dichotomy, reflect a perspective on the “natural world” that is consistent with that of mainstream traditions such as environmentalism and deep ecology: they are “infested by a macho mystique, whereby ‘things natural, wild, and free’ continue to be celebrated and phallocized as corresponding to the ‘human’ order of experience and idealized existence” and in which men “identify with the ‘wild’ and not the ‘tame.’” (Davis, 1995, pp. 196-7). Consequently, “Western culture's smug identification with the ‘knower’ at the expense of the ‘known’ stays intact” (Davis, 1995, p. 197).

6.5 Gendered Exploitation

Along with inequality between species (in particular, human beings and polar bears), this analysis revealed gender inequality in the representations of polar bears. While animals and the rest of the nature are often identified with women and the “feminine” in patriarchal society (Ruether, 1993), I did not find “the polar bear” to be feminized to reinforce “its” domination. I attribute this to the iconic status of the animal: polar bears are positioned as unique creatures to be fascinated with and even revered. The masculine gaze finds in the powerful and manly bear a kindred spirit. Just like the tundra is a masculine playground for the masculine adventurer, it is also a space for the masculine bear (see Section 5.1.3). The touristic experience of exploration and adventure in the “unforgiving” tundra echoes the constructions of polar bears as survivors and endurers of the same harsh environment. Thus, polar bears are not representations of

weakness or fragility, but of masculine power, survival, and strength. Even still, they are merely surrogates for the masculine identity of the adventurer, objects onto which this identity is projected to aid in the fulfillment of a male-dominated wilderness fantasy. According to Davis (1995), “although nonhuman animals are oppressed”, “it is also true that men have traditionally admired and even sought to emulate certain kinds of animals, even as they set out to subjugate and destroy them” (p. 195). She elaborates that “[a]nimals summoning forth images of things that are ‘natural, wild, and free’ accord with the ‘masculine’ spirit of adventure and conquest idolized by our culture.” (p. 196). This is consistent with my interpretation of the polar bear viewing industry, which attempts to endow “the polar bear” with the socially constructed power of masculinity, while simultaneously enacting the human/animal dichotomy.

The discourses of polar bear tourism, therefore, impose the social construction of gender difference onto polar bears. As mentioned above, polar bears are masculinized, attributed characteristics typically associated with males in patriarchal society (such as power, strength, size, pride, and survival through and endurance of harshness). While polar bears are constructed in masculine terms, their power and dominance in the tundra landscape are identified directly with the male sex: polar bears, for example, are referred to as “Kings” and “Lords” of the Arctic (see Section 4.1). According to promotional texts, it is the “solitary giant males” who “patrol the shores” of Western Hudson Bay (Natural Habitat Adventures),²⁷⁷ and it is also the males who “spar,” “play fight” or “rough-house” while the females tend to the young. Natural Habitat Adventures, for example, explains that in Churchill, “mothers tend to cubs and young adult males play-fight as they wait for Hudson Bay to freeze over”.²⁷⁸ This reiterates the qualities of “independence, strength, individuality as masculine” and “dependence, weakness, collectivity as

feminine” (Hulan, 2002, p. 19). It suggests power differences between male and female bears, as well as between the “masculine” and “feminine,” with tourism marketing privileging the male biological sex and masculine identity.

Consistent with gender stereotyping, female polar bears are constructed as gentle, affectionate, nurturing, and caring mothers, and the imagery of motherhood is invoked frequently (see Section 4.6). In contrast to the prevalent male-dominated construction of polar bears, this creates a strong association of female bears with motherhood and childcare. The construction of femininity, therefore, is tied to the female biological sex just as masculinity is identified with the male sex. This is accentuated when the tourism industry verbally juxtaposes mothers and cubs against male polar bears: Natural Habitat Adventures, for example, states that on viewing tours, “we may see mothers with cubs, young males play-fighting, or a huge, solitary male ambling over the tundra.”²⁷⁹ While male bears are associated with power and dominance, as well as social or “leisure” activities such as playing or fighting, female bears are associated almost exclusively with motherhood. This “articulates femininity in terms of motherhood”, reflecting an “ideological formation” termed “essential motherhood” (DiQuinzio, 1999, p. xiii).

This type of thinking explains

mothering [as] a function of women’s essentially female nature, women’s biological reproductive capacities, and/or human evolutionary development[....][and] construes women’s motherhood as natural and inevitable. It requires women’s exclusive and selfless attention to and care of children based on women’s psychological and emotional capacities for empathy, awareness of the needs of others, and self-sacrifice. (DiQuinzio, 1999, p. xiii)

Consistent with this thinking, female polar bears are constructed as available and expert mothers, wholly devoted to their domestic and mothering responsibilities of teaching, nurturing, and protecting their cub(s). In this manner, female bears are confined to the realm of typically construed femininity.

The constructions of the tundra environment and its polar bear inhabitants, therefore, strongly mirror the value-hierarchies of patriarchal society and their embedded dualisms. This sustains the harmful male/female dichotomy and reinforces male superiority over females and nature. It perpetuates the separation of humans (men, more specifically) from the rest of nature, encouraging people “to rank humans above animals, plants, and minerals in hierarchical fashion” and thus continuing to make it difficult for them “to perceive or accept a personal relationship with what they describe as the ‘natural world’” (Sanchez, 1993, p. 211). Femininity, meanwhile, remains tied to domestic responsibilities, while masculinity is identified with survival, resilience, and exploration, along with the freedoms to play and fight with other males. The masculine domain and its associated activities are privileged, embraced, and celebrated in this wilderness landscape. Male polar bears are identified with the masculine notions of wilderness, while females are relegated to the realm of the domestic. Images of mothers and cubs together are ubiquitous in tourism promotional materials, strongly emphasizing motherhood and the maternal bond, and associating female bears with femininity as it is typically construed in a patriarchal system. This is also evident in a hand-drawn postcard of a polar bear baking a pie (Figure 20 in Section 4.3, illustrated by Barbara Stone and produced and sold by the Arctic Trading Company). I acknowledge that the illustrator does not overtly identify the bear as a female. Nonetheless, I perceive it to communicate a gender stereotype: in the context of the

other promotional materials and their oppositional constructions of males and females as well as masculinity and femininity, I interpret the image as a female bear tending to her domestic and feminine responsibilities of cooking and caring for her family.

Not only are male and female polarized, with the privileging of the former, but female bears are essentially made invisible in the tundra landscape. As I engaged with the tourism promotional materials during my analysis, I noticed that I began to perceive all polar bears as males, unless I was guided or directed to interpret the animal as a female. Essentially, the discourses of tourism erase female polar bears from the tundra landscape unless the audience is prompted to imagine that bear as a mother. All other adult bears, lone or in groups, become easily perceived as males. As (I assume) it is difficult for the average person to discern the biological sex of a bear, the tourism industry readily disciplines the audience to view all bears as powerful males, Kings of the tundra. This is done by masculinizing “the polar bear” and not allowing any feminized constructions of bears to dominate. While promotional materials make frequent visual references to the intimate relationship between mother and cub, there is rarely a verbal focus on females or any particular celebration of femininity. “The polar bear,” with his established masculine identity, is a male. Female polar bears, therefore, are erased from the landscape, unless the industry chooses to display them through photographs of a mother and cub(s) or through references of “female” bears tending to their children.

7.1 Revisiting an Interspecies Relationship

The tourism industry seems to hold polar bears in high regard; they are constructed as magnificent animals deserving of global attention and significant admiration. A closer look at these portrayals and the discourses that legitimize them, however, reveals that these animals are entangled in a complex web of unequal power relations rooted deeply in the patriarchal system of domination. The discourses of tourism explored in this analysis function to naturalize an instrumental relationship between human beings and other animals, to encourage the celebration of polar bears primarily for their ability to delight, fascinate, and entertain tourists. This “camouflage” is typical of social practices (both tourism and non-tourism specific) that involve some sort of interaction between human beings and other animals. For instance, while analyzing the visual representations of trophy animals in hunting magazines, Kalof and Fitzgerald (2003) had to disentangle themselves from the “taken-for-granted stories of love and affection for nature, wildlife and magnificent animals” in which the “visual representations of dead animal bodies are embedded” (p. 119). Looking beyond the “dominant notion of what it means to display dead trophy animals” allowed the authors to see the “extreme objectification of animal bodies” in hunting magazines, “instead of love and respect for nature and individual animals” (p. 119).

The few and limited attempts to infuse some notions of care and respect for polar bear are overwhelmed by the highly anthropocentric messages and objectifying language of tourism promotion, in which the experiences of animals (both “captive” and “wild”) are marginalized. As discussed in Section 6.3, the experiences of individual polar bears are either ignored altogether

or cleverly scripted for the tourism context. Once again, a parallel can be drawn between the supposedly “non-consumptive” practice of polar bear viewing and the obviously consumptive tradition of hunting for “sport”. As Kheel (1996b) maintains, “hunting can exist as a sport only by conferring subjective identity on the animal” while, at the same time, “hunters can only pursue the death of an animal as playful activity by denying the animal’s subjective experience and focusing exclusively on their own experience” (p. 33). As my analysis of various texts of tourism promotion revealed, polar bears are represented to wilfully engage in tourism encounters, driven by the desire and eagerness to satiate their own curiosity about human beings or to please their “audience.”

Analysis of these representations of polar bears further reveals an interspecies relationship that engages limitedly (if at all) with the notions of care, connectedness, and kindness espoused by ecofeminists. Instead of “listening to animals, paying emotional attention, taking seriously—*caring about*—what they are telling us” (Donovan, 2006, p. 305), polar bears are valued and treated predominantly as commodities, and “understood” primarily in scientific terms or through highly anthropomorphized interpretations. Quoting the words of Sandra Harding (1986, p. 124), Donovan (2006) insists that “humans must cease imposing their voice on that of animals” by “[r]ejecting the imperialist imperative of the scientific method, in which the ‘scientific subject’s voice[...]speaks with general and abstract authority [and] the objects of inquiry ‘speak’ only in response to what scientists ask them” (p. 324).

Attempting to understand and relate to other animals through a heavily anthropomorphic perspective can also encourage harmful and oppressive interactions between human beings and polar bears. According to Desmond (1999), “Animals may be ‘cute’ when they

exhibit behaviors coded as human, but they never stop being perceived as animals” because “[w]hatever an animal does ultimately reaffirms our concept of it *as* an animal, given the resilience of the human-nonhuman divide” (original emphasis, p. 174). Anthropomorphized interpretations of animals thus reinforce the dichotomy between humans and other-than-human animals because they highlight the “humanness of the actions and the nonhumanness of the performers” (Desmond, 1999, p. 174). In other words, the perception that the movements and behaviours of animals reproduce the behaviours of humans relies on the delineation of species and the recognition that the agent performing these actions is “animal” and *other* than human. Other theorists argue, however, that anthropomorphism may have a place in positive and healthy interspecies relationships. Bulbeck (2005), for example, observes that while “[m]any of the new[...]rangers and guides [at animal encounter sites][...]resist visitors’ anthropomorphic responses with scientific facts or environmental messages”, “many visitors at my research sites enjoyed being close to animals: cuddling koalas, feeding lorikeets or swimming with dolphins” and “[f]or some this tactile experience may have been more meaningful than the ecological messages” (p. 200). This suggests that anthropomorphism may help people to connect with other-than-human animals and to foster caring interspecies relationships and interactions.

In the context of this study, however, anthropomorphized constructions of polar bears are damaging as they often embrace and perpetuate sexist stereotypes and exist alongside the commodification and marginalization of polar bears by the tourism industry. However, the emotional connection with polar bears does not need to rely on the notion of “sameness” (i.e., the perceived similarities between humans and polar bears). On the contrary, we can foster and sustain this connection by embracing “dialogical care theory”, which involves

listening to other life-forms regardless of how alien they may seem to us and incorporating their communications into our moral reaction to them. In other words, even if we don't feel the cuddly warmth we might toward a human infant—presumably the paradigmatic experience in care theory—we nevertheless can read other creatures' language on the principle of homology, for their nonverbal language is very much like ours. In the case of snakes and spiders, for example, we can see by their body language[...]that they experience terror and anxiety, that they shrink away from sources of pain, that they want to live. We must respect their wishes in any human decision making about their condition. (Donovan, 2006, p. 315)

It is important to note that Donovan is not suggesting that other-than-human animals deserve moral consideration on account of their similarities to human beings (as is argued by some animal rights theorists). Instead, she demonstrates that “[t]he question[...]whether humans can understand animals is[...]a moot one” since one can imagine “how the animal is feeling based on how one would feel in a similar situation” (p. 322). Donovan acknowledges that while “there is always the danger that one might misread the communication of the animal” and that “all communication is imperfect” (p. 322), this approach allows us to dialogue with other animals and to *try* to understand their reactions.

An important element of engaging in this conversation with other animals is “reject[ing] the notion that any part of the world, human or animal, exists for the use and pleasure of any other part” (Vance, 1995, p. 181). By employing an “instrumental characterization of animals” (Vance, 1995, p. 181), the tourism industry wilfully ignores the voices of the polar bears on whom it relies. While my goal in undertaking this analysis has not been to vilify the people

involved in the tourism industry, I have hoped to highlight the disappointing and harmful absence—among the texts and discourses of tourism—of narratives that emphasize “the importance of caring, attention, kindness, playfulness, trust, empathy, and connection” and “demonstrate that ethical behaviour toward the nonhuman world is a kind of joyfulness, an embracing of possibility, a self-respecting and respectful humility” (Vance, 1995, p. 181).

I was saddened by the disregard for and silencing of polar bears’ voices during my own experience of a polar bear viewing tour aboard a tundra vehicle. On several occasions, I felt “the communicated desires of the animal” were neither taken seriously nor “incorporate[ed][...]into our moral reaction to them” (as Donovan, 2005, p. 315, suggests). In one scenario, our tundra buggy and a large handful of others in tow approached a mother and her cub who were walking together along the tundra. We positioned ourselves along their route to optimize our “viewing opportunities.” As we sat, watching and snapping photographs from our open windows, the polar bears walked past us and continued out of our sights. In response, we started our engines and followed in their direction. When we “found” them the second time, the mother polar bear and her cub were resting next to each other in a position that communicated to me a connectedness, intimacy, and dependency between the two animals, and a desire for some peaceful rest. We stopped near the bears, a stalled procession of vehicles and captivated gazes. Several minutes had passed when the mother and cub stirred, stood up, and once again walked away from us and our tundra vehicles. I believe we would have persisted in following them had they not walked back in the direction whence we came. Discouraged by the idea of retracing our steps along the trail, we moved on in search of our next bear.

On another occasion, we approached a polar bear who was sleeping in a small patch of willow cover. The tundra vehicles nearly surrounded the bear, each no more than ten metres from the animal. Then, with the sleeping bear positioned perfectly outside our windows, we settled in to eat our lunches, staying this way for over an hour. The bear occasionally rose his or her head to look at us, maybe roused by our chatter or the smell of food drifting from our still-open windows. Or perhaps he or she was bothered by our sudden arrival, prolonged stay, and unwarranted proximity. I believe that carrying on like this—enjoying our food, and watching, photographing, and generally delighting at the sight of this bear resting within metres from us (who had likely been fasting for the many months he or she had now been off the ice)—was imposing and discompassionate. I felt that, as a community of tourists and tour operators, we did not “face [our] fellow creatures with humility” (Manning, 1996, p. 116) nor did we allow the notions of care and connectedness to help us form an “ethical response” (Donovan, 2006) to the communications of polar bears that day.

While this study focused primarily on the promotional materials of independent tourism operators, I have tried to acknowledge the role of government institutions in the co-construction of identities and perceived realities of polar bears in the polar bear viewing context by analyzing the materials circulated by Travel Manitoba and the Canadian Tourism Commission—crown corporations at the provincial and federal levels, respectively. Both of these entities are rooted in tourism: as tourism marketing organizations, their principal goal is to promote their respective destinations. This makes them essentially different from other government bodies that are not tourism-specific and have an alternate focus, but that also potentially influence the polar bear viewing industry. For example, polar bear viewing in Churchill takes place primarily in the

Churchill Wildlife Management Area, and a small portion in Wapusk National Park; both are protected areas, the former managed by a branch of the provincial government of Manitoba called Manitoba Conservation, and the latter by Parks Canada, an agency of the Government of Canada. While I familiarized myself with the website and policy documents of the Churchill Wildlife Management Area, and reviewed a number of such materials associated with Wapusk National Park, I did not examine these as closely or with the same degree of attention as I had the promotional materials—a limitation of this discourse analysis. I believe that our understanding of the workings of, and interactions between, various discourses of polar bear tourism can benefit greatly from research that investigates these agencies and the policies and laws they produce and/or enforce. Their influence in co-constructing “the polar bear” for the human audience and in mediating the relationship between human beings and polar bears is especially important to consider in future projects as these *authoritative* discourses are situated within socially powerful institutions of government and science, and perhaps set an example of “acceptable” practices for tourism operators to follow and “appropriate” ideologies to adopt. Such studies can investigate the policies and legislation relevant to the Churchill Wildlife Management Area and Wapusk National Park, paying particular attention to how they, too, resist or reproduce social inequality, power abuse, and the domination of other-than-human animals. Analysis can include The Wildlife Act, The Polar Bear Protection Act, The Resource Tourism Act, The Endangered Species Act, along with international agreements regarding polar bears such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora, and the Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears. In addition, this research endeavour can extend its scope of interest to other Canadian (and international) programs that may interact with and

be relevant to the Churchill polar bear viewing industry, such as the Canadian Polar Bear Technical Committee and the Polar Bear Administrative Committee, which focus on collaboratively managing polar bear populations in Canada.

At a cursory glance, the policies, legislation, and other pertinent materials noted above reflect, to borrow the words of Jamal et al. (2006), “scientific-managerialist discourses” that are also embedded in conservation ideologies. As one illustrative example among many, Manitoba Conservation states on its website that “[i]n order to protect people and property at the Churchill townsite, Manitoba must unfortunately destroy some polar bears. The number killed or removed remains small and does not affect the population” (Manitoba Conservation, n.d., “Polar bears in Manitoba”). This passage is not “neutral”, nor is it devoid of an ethic: it reveals a particular perspective on other-than-human animals, a perspective in which human beings and other animals are positioned such that power is distributed and circulated in an intentional way. It is important to critically examine these discourses—their practices as well as philosophical and conceptual underpinnings—and to think about how they support or resist visions of a sustainable, ethical, and responsible polar bear viewing industry that values kindness and compassion toward all living beings, and fosters caring, hopeful, and life-affirming interspecies relationships.

7.2 Reconceptualizing “Impacts” on and “Harms” to Animals

These findings and reflections are relevant to the broader field of wildlife tourism of which polar bear viewing in Churchill is a part. The wildlife tourism literature presents an extensive discussion on the *consumptiveness* of various wildlife tourism activities: Duffus and Dearden (1990), for example, argue that wildlife tourism activities fall along a continuum of

consumption, where the most consumptive activities involve the permanent removal of the animal from his or her natural environment, while non-consumptive activities include “human recreational engagement with wildlife wherein the focal organism is not purposefully removed or permanently affected by the engagement” (p. 216). Such non-consumptive tourism activities include “birdwatching[;] whale-watching[;] photographic trips[;] organized and individual nature walks[;] commercial photography and cinematography[; and] secondary wildlife viewing in parks, reserves and recreational areas” (Duffus & Dearden, 1990, p. 216). Similarly, Lovelock (2008) considers non-consumptive wildlife tourism to include “wildlife viewing, photography, [and] feeding and interacting [with animals] in various ways” (p. 4). The classification of these types of activities as non-consumptive wildlife tourism is consistent with Tremblay’s (2001) argument that “[i]n the recreation and tourism literatures, wildlife-viewing has been described as ‘non-consumptive’” (p. 81). It is reasonable to suggest, therefore, that polar bear viewing (such as in Churchill) falls within the scope of non-consumptive wildlife tourism as construed by the dominant discourses of wildlife tourism.

It is fitting, then, that Wat’chee Expeditions, for instance, identifies itself as “a full-service non-consumptive wilderness lodge”,²⁸⁰ providing an industry example of Tremblay’s (2001) observation that the word “‘consumptive’ is regularly used for the sake of advocating one form of tourism at the expense of another” (p. 81). The defining characteristics of non-consumptive wildlife tourism contribute to its overlap, and blurring of conceptual boundaries, with “ecotourism,” a term or concept also used often to differentiate a niche tourism product that embodies and represents an alternative form of tourism (Wearing & Jobbers, 2011). Unsurprisingly, then, a number of tour operators analyzed in this study consider themselves to

be facilitators and providers of ecotourism experiences (see Section 5.3). Academic literature seems to agree with the classification of polar bear viewing as ecotourism: Lemelin, Fennell and Smale (2008), for example, approach polar bear viewers in Churchill as “wildlife ecotourists”, though they are revealed to be predominantly “soft/shallow” rather than “hard/deep ecotourists” (p. 55). Elsewhere, Fennell (2008) clarifies the connection between wildlife tourism and ecotourism, arguing that wildlife tourism activities can be considered ecotourism when they are non-consumptive (as in the viewing of free-roaming animals), “but fall outside the bounds of ecotourism” when they involve consumptive forms of outdoor recreation (p. 31).

In the wildlife tourism context, the term “non-consumptive” is often assumed to “reflect and convey morally superior values” (Duffus & Dearden, 1990, p. 83) and to “suggest that some tourism activities which do not harvest or remove specimens from their environments have no impact” (Lemelin, 2006, p. 517). In the discussions on the meaning and significance of “consumptiveness,” notable emphasis is placed on the *impacts* of tourism activities on the various *resources* involved in the tourism experience. For example, Fennell (2008) explains that consumptiveness of the activity[...]should be considered to illustrate that all forms of outdoor recreation and tourism have some type of impact—however insignificant—on the resource base, with some being less severe than others (consumptive forms of tourism include those that are said to consume resources, such as hunting and fishing). (p. 25)

The findings of this study strongly support the arguments that the “connotation [of ‘non-consumptiveness’] with low impacts or noble motives” (Tremblay, 2001, p. 81) is misleading and problematic, as is “the classification of ecotourism as non-consumptive” practice (Meletis &

Campbell, 2007, p. 859). Meletis and Campbell (2007) maintain that “by focusing on the ‘direct removal of the species’ in defining consumptive use, the figurative consumption (including visual consumption) associated with ecotourism and impacts thereof are overlooked” (p. 854). In support of this statement, the concepts of “consumption” and “impacts” are all too often narrowly conceived or defined in wildlife tourism research, overlooking an entirely different dimension of the dynamics between human beings and other animals. In the polar bear viewing context, Lemelin’s (2006) “The gawk, the glance, and the gaze: Ocular consumption and polar bear tourism in Churchill, Manitoba, Canada” is among the few works that attempt to broaden and deepen these conceptualizations with respect to the visual consumption of wildlife: more specifically, Lemelin explores the visual consumption of polar bears through photography and the wildlife tourist gaze (see Sections 2.3 and 6.2 for more discussion of Lemelin’s work). In a related effort, I have explored the consumption of polar bears by the tourist audience—as figures in and of Canadian wilderness, as silly and inquisitive personalities, as fascinating and awe-inspiring characters in a Northern story, and, among others, as enthusiastic performers and entertainers in the tundra spectacle—by approaching the *production* of “the polar bear” and “the polar bear viewing experience” by the tourism industry and the discourses of tourism of which it is a part. I have found within these production-consumption relationships highly objectifying messages, the marginalization of polar bears and their lived and experienced realities, the imposition of hegemonic gender roles onto the lives of polar bears (especially in the construction of the wild, masculine bear, and domestic, feminine bear), and, among other findings, an exploitative attitude toward these animals. I consider these distressing and urgently important “impacts” on or “harms” to polar bears that require and deserve attention. However,

the oppressive and instrumental relationship between human beings and polar bears that emerged through this study, and its connection and significance to the realities of polar bears, are obscured by the dominant conceptualizations of impacts and traditional approaches to the study of human-other-than-human animal relationships. This echoes the argument by Meletis and Campbell (2007) that, in the ecotourism context, the “focus on the direct interaction of tourists and wildlife” from a conservation perspective means that “other impacts are hidden and, therefore, unacknowledged, unanticipated, and unaddressed” (p. 862). In extension of this sentiment, I propose that we diversify the conceptual toolkit with which to critically approach even the most “benign” or “morally superior” wildlife tourism activities (such as the viewing of free-roaming animals in their natural environment) to attune ourselves to the issues of oppression, domination, and exploitation between species.

7.3 Reframing Justice, Fairness, and Sustainability in Tourism

While ecofeminist philosophy offered invaluable insights into the power differential between human beings and polar bears in the polar bear viewing context of this study, this theoretical orientation has the potential to inform broader concepts that find relevance across contexts. The notion of sustainability, for example, currently pervades the tourism field, its practical and theoretical features and importance to particular circumstances energetically explored and challenged. In his discussion of the similarities and differences between wildlife tourism, nature-based tourism, and ecotourism, for instance, Fennell (2012) states that sustainability is an example of an element that is perhaps equally important to all three tourism categories (p. 192). This powerful concept has also garnered much critical attention. The way sustainability is conceptualized and operationalized exhibits a tendency similar to one associated

above with “consumptiveness” discourse: Jamal, Camargo and Wilson (2013) insist that “[m]uch of tourism research to date has focused on understanding the relationship between human activity and impact—a largely scientific question” (p. 4595). Furthermore, the philosophical foundation of sustainability and sustainable tourism has been criticized for its “instrumental and utilitarian discourse” (p. 4599), “anthropocentric values” (p. 4600), and embedded “ideologies for the use and control of nature and people as a resource” (p. 4600). Jamal et al. (2013) argue that missing from the academic research on sustainability and tourism is “a focus on the voices and experiences of the ‘Other’, such as of those who are most affected by tourism change but least able to speak for themselves, and of those who research tourism from their side” (p. 4595). In light of this neglected gap, the authors suggest that attention be paid to “*justice and fairness* towards those who stand to be most impacted by environmental, social and cultural changes in the complex tourism system” (original emphasis, p. 4604). Jamal et al. (2013) elaborate that “justice[...]has to be furthermore accompanied by *care*” (original emphasis, p. 4604), noting that an “ethic of care, care about the ‘Other’[...]as discussed in eco-feminism[...]would bring emotion, feeling, and good virtues into the justice framework” (p. 4606).

While I strongly agree that ecofeminist theory and, more specifically, the ethic of care can help to reframe sustainability in the way envisioned by Jamal and colleagues above, I observe a serious omission in their reconceptualization—other-than-human animals as individual, living beings are not explicitly included in the justice framework or the reframed notion of sustainability. Generally speaking, the concept of sustainability reflects (even in small part) holist philosophies and theories of environmental ethics such as ecocentrism, in which the ecosphere is a being that transcends in importance any one species (de Groot, Drenthen, & de

Groot, 2011). Although this is some shift from anthropocentrism, individual beings of the ecosystem are intentionally overlooked in the interest of “species,” “the ecosystem,” or “the biotic community” (Kheel, 2008). Human beings seem to be central to the justice framework envisioned by Jamal et al. (2013), and other animals are considered in the contexts of “species conservation” and “ecocultural” and “human-environmental” relationships (p. 4607). In the endeavour to reconceptualize “sustainability,” the opportunity to learn from and channel ecofeminism’s critical insights into healthy interspecies relationships is thus overlooked. My hope in saying this is to build on the thoughtful contributions of Jamal, Camargo and Wilson (2013) to the tourism literature, and I share my interpretations of ecofeminism and the ethic of care as it extends to other animals in an effort to help craft a different way of thinking about sustainability.

Ecofeminist philosophy passionately encourages the recognition of individual other-than-human animal lives, helping to situate these animals as the “‘Other’ (diverse) body in sustainable tourism research” (Jamal et al., 2013, p. 4607) each with his or her own subjective experiences, needs, and self-interests. Reconceptualizing sustainability alongside the ethic of care means paying attention to the communications of other animals, regardless of how different they may seem from us, and incorporating their communicated desires into our “ethical decision making” (Donovan, 2006, p. 310). This is consistent with the sentiment advanced by Jamal et al. (2013) that the integration of an ethic of care into the justice framework of sustainability “would enable considerations such as: respect for diversity, recognition of difference, consideration for intangible human-environmental plus social-cultural differences in gender, sex, ethnicity; support of social differentiation and diversity; sympathy, mercy, forgiveness, tolerance, and

inclusiveness” (p. 4606). To me, these words radiate hope, promise, and a boundless potential, as long as other-than-human animals are not beyond the scope of their meaning and intention. While I believe that the stories and realities of other-than-human animals *are* “voices and experiences of the ‘Other’[...]who [is] most affected by tourism change but least able to speak for [him or herself]” (p. 4595), I believe they *do* have voices that are, devastatingly, subverted or silenced—in the context of this study, by the dominant discourses of polar bear tourism, and in a broader sense, by the oppressive patriarchal system of domination. Learning from ecofeminist philosophy as we reconceptualize the concepts of “sustainability” and rethink the “impacts” of tourism activities means “not just ‘caring about [the] welfare [of animals]’ but ‘caring about what they are telling us’” (Donovan, 2006, p. 310). Borrowing the powerful words of Josephine Donovan (1996), “If we listen, we can hear them” (p. 52).

It is encouraging to see the integration of this perspective into the tourism literature, however rare. Fennell and Sheppard (2011), for example, offer a brief ecofeminist reading of the post-Olympic “sled dog cull” in Whistler, British Columbia. Following the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games held in Vancouver, British Columbia, approximately 100 dogs were brutally killed by a dog sled tour company that found it financially infeasible to keep the dogs alive once the Olympic games came to a close. Fennell and Sheppard (2011) note the absence of an ethic of care in this distressing case, stating that “[i]t is clear that the dogs were not treated with care; they suffered in life and in death” (p. 206). The authors suggest that the application of an ecofeminist perspective offers an opportunity to “provide a voice for the dogs” (p. 206) and to engage with “[o]ur emotional [and] empathetic responses” to their horrific slaughter, rather than rely solely on “cold, hard reasoning” (p. 206).

The exploitation of other-than-human animals is a social issue, one that intersects gender and species studies, among others, because of the interlocking nature of oppressions (Adams, 1990). The notions of social justice and fairness should be inclusive of all inhabitants that share life on this planet, regardless of species. Jamal, Borges and Stronza (2006) explain that in the tourism context, “[s]ocial sustainability and social equity apply to both ‘guests’ and hosts” and that it “is not just the tourist experience (which most industry-driven definitions are concerned about)” that matters, “but the experience of all participants—how various stakeholders relate to, live with, and are transformed by the mediating practices of ecotourism” (p. 165). Ecofeminist philosophy and the ethic of care remind us of the place other-than-human animals should occupy in these visions of social justice and equity, and ecofeminist analysis reveals how rarely these animals are considered “participants” and “stakeholders” in tourism experiences and in life. The physical, emotional, mental and perhaps even spiritual well-being of other than-human animals (among other dimensions of their experiences that we may never fully understand) are important to, and should be considered when thinking about, the health, integrity and vitality of societies. The power dynamics of oppressive tourism ideologies and practices require thoughtful attention in critical tourism studies—thoughtful in its expression of care, compassion, and kindness toward other animals, and sincere concern and respect for the integrity of all life—even though “speak[ing] of hope and love as academics[...]makes us vulnerable, as this is associated with weakness, irrationality and emotion—particularly in an academy conditioned to principles of distance, objectivity and rationality” (Pritchard, Morgan, & Ateljevic, 2011, p. 951). I believe that such an approach has the potential to answer Mair’s (2012) call for critical tourism work that “include[s] an effort to change the discourse of tourism[...]to challenge mainstream

approaches” and “to re-frame everyday assumptions and expectations” (p. 42). It can also revive, to use the words of Higgins-Desbiolles (2006), “the forgotten power of tourism as a social force” in the transformation of interspecies relationships gripped by power differentials, self-interest, and fear and intolerance of difference, to those of care, connectedness and understanding.

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