

**We Come From the Land of Camp Camp Baby:**  
**A Settler Reflection on Wilderness Education at Residential Summer Camp**

By

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## **Abstract**

Residential summer camps are fascinating cultural productions. Physical spaces are produced with the aim of offering youth a chance to ‘escape’ their modern urban lives. This escape is framed as a way of building connections to the natural and social worlds while nurturing a particular kind of character building. I grew up going to camp, and now I work at the same camp that has deeply shaped my sense of being in the world. Looking back at my experiences here, I also now see that this very space, Camp Thunderbird, is rooted in settler colonial ideology and practice. From the name, to the land upon which the camp sits, to the philosophical orientation of the camp’s mission, this camp, and my experiences here (including connections with nature, people, history, and personal character building), are positioned in a settler colonial place of privilege and complexity. These spaces have a history of the separating people from nature, cultural appropriation of Indigenous cultures, and supporting social divisions based on identities such as gender and race. Summer camps have been part of a failed attempt to slow or oppose the momentum of modernism. Summer camps must forge a new place in the postmodern world. If camps are spaces aimed at creating social and environmental connection, they must take steps to reconcile their troubled past. This paper explores the complex relationships of settler colonialism and wilderness education at residential summer camp.

*Keywords:* Wilderness, Settler Colonialism, Summer Camp, Outdoor Education, Adventure, Social Justice, Environmental Justice, Postmodernism

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## **We Come From the Land of Camp Camp Baby**

There is a critical point in every tide cycle when the water starts to change direction. The tide has been rising for six odd hours, building to its maximum, then tapering to slack. It is at this moment when, as a sea kayaker, I aim to traverse challenging waters. Slack tide is a time when I am willing to go places that I would never dare go when the water is in full flood or ebb due to the sheer might of the water's will to go in one direction. There is a common misconception that the water stands still at slack tide. But, when it comes to tides and currents, change is the only constant; the water is always moving, and slack tide is one of the most confusing times for the water. With little momentum, the water is being pulled in multiple directions and seems to pace back and forth while it decides which direction it wants to go.

I believe that our society is currently in a state that resembles the slack tide. In some ways we are still riding the tide of modernism, and with that comes "individualism, anthropocentrism, patriarchy, mechanization, economism, consumerism, nationalism, and militarism" (Griffin, 1988, xi, as quoted by Orr, 1992, ix). But that tide is rapidly shifting to a wave of postmodernism, which "provides support for the ecology, peace, feminist and other emancipatory movements of our time, while stressing that the inclusive emancipation must be from modernity itself" (Griffin, 1988, xi, as quoted by Orr, 1992, ix). It is our responsibility to ensure that the coming tide brings about social and environmental justice rather than further inequity. I have found particular interest in the way that outdoor education institutions, such as summer camps, are responding to the recent changing tide. Summer camps arose as spaces of antimodernism, where youth could escape from modernity (Wall, 2009). But today I question if an escape is what the upcoming generation truly needs. Maybe, what youth need is a space that teaches them how to find social and natural connection in a postmodern world. If this is the case,

then summer camps, which have historical roots in perpetuating settler colonialism, heteronormativity, gender norms, and class division (Wall, 2009), need to adapt to postmodern demands and become spaces of decolonization, sexuality and gender freedom, and social justice. I believe that this shift is not only possible, but the tide is already starting to rise.

## **Introduction**

I have watched as the story of this changing tide has unfolded over my time as a camper and staff member at a summer camp. This thesis is my way of sharing that story and has become a personal journey of discovery about summer camp, which first undermined, then reinvigoration my attachment to a space that shaped my youth. Through the writing of this story I discovered some disheartening troubles with the historic and current state of summer camps, but I also discovered new potentials. As with any good story, I first need set the stage, introduce some characters, present the problem, raise the stakes, and finally solve the problem or at least take steps towards a solution. So before I get too far into this story, some introductions are needed.

First I need to introduce myself, my motivations to tell this story, and my connections to summer camp. Then, I will take a step back to give a foundational history of some important characters in this story. The main character I will be following is the notion of “wilderness”. Starting with the role of wilderness in North American settler colonialism, I will tell the story of how wilderness became central to the preservation of the frontier and how this preservation played a role in the creation of summer camps. Once summer camps truly enter the story, I will explore the ways that programming at summer camps adapted slowly from using risk and adventure education to build character, to using environmental education to connect with nature.

With the history of wilderness and its role in summer camps established, I will unpack the troubles that the notion of wilderness bring to the postmodern quest to make summer camp a

force for social justice, reconciliation and decolonization. The attachment to pristine and untouched wilderness that summer camps perpetuate is part of an ongoing separation of people from nature that is integral to modernization. This separation has had and continues to have a heavy impact on Indigenous peoples in Canada. The consequences of this separation are amplified and ignored at summer camp through a history of cultural appropriation and generalizations about Indigenous peoples. Camps need to become forces of reconciliation. Meanwhile, the portrayal of wilderness also has lasting impacts on how welcoming summer camps are to individuals from diverse social identities. In the latter half of this thesis I explore some of the ways that social identity affects the amount of welcome that individuals feel at summer camps and in spaces identified as wilderness.

Finally, with all of the problems with wilderness and its presentation at summer camps laid out, I will explore the ways that summer camps can become part of a shifting narrative surrounding wilderness. I will present alternative narratives to the notion of wilderness and changes that outdoor educators can make to their program to shift from antimodernism to postmodernism. My hope is that this thesis will contribute to a shifting tide within outdoor education and summer camping. I will have accomplished that goal if I can at least bring some awareness to a different way of thinking about wilderness.

## **Self-Introduction**

In large part, this thesis tells the story of my personal journey in discovering the role that summer camps can play during this time of change. This journey has led to many challenging discoveries and conclusions about a place and space that I associate with large parts of my development as a young adult. Because of the personal narrative that underpins these revelations,

I believe that it is important to introduce myself and the motivations which have impacted my research.

The easiest place to start this introduction is to disclose parts of my identity that cannot be as easily perceived through the medium of written word, but would be apparent in person. I am a cisgender, straight, middle-class, young, able-bodied, blonde, white man. While all of these social identities are beyond my control, they also impact the way I am viewed by others, and my view on summer camps. These parts of my identity mean that I fit into many of the social identities that hold an imbalance of privilege in Canadian society, and these same social identities have always been welcome at summer camps. My position of privilege makes it challenging to recognize that not everyone feels the same benefit or welcome at summer camps and with their outdoor education programs. Privilege operates as an invisible (to the privileged) force of normalization and belonging. Summer camps in Canada were made for people exactly like me. I fit in at camp and I am just starting to question how others fit in. This thesis emerges in this taken-for-grantedness.

One of my goals with this thesis is to address reconciliation and Indigenous-settler relations. Summer camp is a settler colonial production, and space. I need to thus also take an opportunity early on to acknowledge my family heritage and the space I occupy as a settler/immigrant/occupier/white man who benefits from the current state of settler colonialism in Canada. My ancestry is a mix of European settlers and immigrants, mostly Swedish and Anglo-Saxon. I grew up and currently reside in traditional unceded Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ territory, in Victoria B.C.. I am an undergraduate student at Thompson Rivers University, on Secwepemcúl'ecw, the traditional unceded territory of the Secwepemc people. Most of my work has been in outdoor education, passing on an environmental ethic and love for adventure to youth



at a summer camp in the traditional unceded territory of the T'Sou-Ke Nation, in Sooke B.C.. I am fortunate to live, study, and work in such beautiful spaces, and am grateful to those who have and continue to act as caretakers of these spaces.

In short, the purpose of this self-introduction is to express that I am part of many groups that currently benefit at the expense of others. Many of these benefits are historic, but some are happening right now without my control. It has been a challenging journey to discover what I can do as a person who benefits from these systems to enact change. For example, what role I can play in reconciliation and decolonization as a non-Indigenous person who actively works, plays, and lives on unceded Indigenous lands. There are some things that I cannot do, nor do I feel that it is my place to. It is not my place to reclaim culture or language that was taken through the cultural genocide of residential schools, The Indian Act, and potlatch bans. I can support those endeavors, but my social identity limits what I am comfortable passing on to others without appropriating or misrepresenting Indigenous cultures. The same applies for my gender identity, sexuality, race, class, etc. I have come to the conclusion that one of the most powerful things I can do, from my place of privilege and power, is to expose the systems that create imbalances of power and privilege.

In many ways, this thesis is about the tension between forces outside of my control such as these components of my identity and the forces over which I do have control. I cannot control the history of summer camps and outdoor education; histories that have made these spaces benefit some populations at the expense of, or despite the harm to others. I can make these inequalities visible and influence the future of these space to support a connection between people and nature in a way that acknowledges historical and ongoing power relations.

## **Inspiration from an Unlikely Place**

The inspiration for this exploration of space at summer camp came from many places, but the defining moment for me came last summer when I was trying to explain to a camper why he could not pee on a beach. It was a beach that many years before, when I was a camper, I had paddled past in need of relief and was denied by my leaders with the simple explanation that “the beach is on IR, which is kinda like private property and we can’t land there”. What I did not understand then, but knew when I was leading trips last summer, was that the beach in question was in Lamalchi Bay, and in that very spot that a British naval gunboat was repulsed by Penelakut warriors in 1863 and later returned to firebomb the Native village (Arnett, 1999). These interactions were part of the violent and unlawful colonial alienation of land from Indigenous people in the Gulf Islands and Southern Vancouver Island. This knowledge placed me in an uncomfortable position. Alienation is part of the current system of colonialism that I, and many participants at camp, have benefited from at the expense of Indigenous peoples. I knew that I should not let the camper pee on that beach, but I was not sure if it was my own white guilt or something more shaping this feeling. If I was not letting him pee on that beach because he was a white boy peeing on a site of colonial violence, was there really anything different with me taking white boys to pee on every other beach in the Gulf Islands? This moment was a catalyst for me to pursue a greater understanding the role summer camps play in perpetuating settler colonial norms. This research helped me see the other ways that summer camps and outdoor education can uphold systems of oppression as well as the potential to shift that support towards reconciliation and decolonization.

## **Introduction to Summer Camps**

Outdoor education has always been presented to me as a critical pedagogy, one that opposes the traditional classroom. I had always held that to be true, but in this thesis I decided to use “[c]ontemporary critical theory, [which] claims all behavior either supports or opposes dominant social orders” (Rose & Paisley, 2012, p. 139; citing Giroux, 1983), to examine the role of outdoor education in supporting or opposing systems of inequality. My connection to summer camps made them a natural place to start this journey. I aimed to uncover the ways that summer camps uphold systemic oppression based on race, culture, gender identity, sexuality, age, ability, and other social identities and how we can shift that support to movements of social justice that oppose these oppressions (hooks, 2003; Warren, Roberts, Breunig, & Alvarez, 2014). While I attempt a critical approach to summer camps in this thesis, my connection to these spaces makes it difficult to be objective. I think that going to summer camps is a powerful and positive experience for many youth. At the same time, if they continue to reinforce and re-energize structures of inequality, normalizing dominant cultural forms, these formative childhood experiences are tempered by broader social problematics. Summer camps can and need to change to benefit a more diverse population. With this thesis, I hope to begin a conversation about the imbalance of privilege at summer camps, find ways to make summer camps into spaces that are accessible to all youth, and foster deeper connection with their environment and each other.

The majority of my experience at summer camp has been at one camp, so I will mainly be drawing connections to my experience there. This limited scope may restrict the application of my recommendations at other camps, but it also gives me a clear opinion of my camp. Reading about other forms of outdoor education and summer camping has given me experiences

to compare with my own, much as I hope that future readers will use my writing to gauge their own experience.

I started going to camp in the summer of 2001 when I was six years old. My parents decided to send me and my sibling away for a week to Camp Thunderbird, in Sooke, BC (45 minutes from my childhood home in Victoria). All the residential camps of a similar nature that were close to where we lived had some sort of religious affiliation, and even though Camp Thunderbird is run by the historically Christian YMCA-YWCA, religious content is not obviously present within programming. The goal of camp and the Y was and still is to build healthy people, strong communities (YMCA-YWCA Vancouver Island, 2018). At Camp Thunderbird, this goal is achieved through outdoor education with a focus on teaching participants the “seven secrets of the Thunderbird”; teamwork, sharing, caring, honesty, respect, friendship, and responsibility. All of these values aligned with my parents’ values; but mostly they sent me to camp so I could grow and learn outside in nature for a week each summer with a new group of peers.

I spent my first six years at camp as an “Explorer” and a “Pioneer”, going to camp for a week with a one night hike trip on camp’s 1200 acre site. The next three years, I was in “Outpost” and “Wilderness”, where I spend two weeks at camp, including a four to eight day sea kayak, canoe or hike trip. My last two summers as a camper were as in the Leadership Development (LD) program. As an LD 1 camper, I spent a full month at camp, with two weeks on trip focusing on “hard skills”, one week sea kayaking around Quadra Island, and one week canoeing and hiking in Strathcona Park. As an LD2, I spent a month at camp focusing on “soft skills” with a shorter five day hike on the Juan de Fuca Trail. My years as an LD were a transition period and a rite of passage for me from the role of camper to the role of staff. As a

staff member at Camp Thunderbird, I have spent six summers imparting the impactful experience of summer camp onto the next generation of campers.

I have seen many shifts in my seventeen year tenure at camp. Since my time as a camper, most of the programs have undergone changes. The “wilderness” program no longer exists, the duration of the LD programs have shortened, and new programs have been introduced, like day camp and basecamp (no outtrip) options. Because I, like many staff at camp, grew up with and had positive experiences with the old programs, I was opposed to these changes at first. For example, when basecamp was introduced, rather than seeing that the new program would give an opportunity for youth who did not want to go on trip to participate in a summer camp experience, I saw it as a threat to the outtrip programs at camp. My first year on staff, I was part of a three hour discussion about whether we should stop making kids line up outside the dining hall before meals. This seemingly simple decision took so long because of the culture of resistance to change at camp that has been present at camp for as long as I can remember. The staff at camp care deeply about passing on the best experience to the every camper. This dedication can make it hard to make room for new developments when it means letting go of things that were positive experiences for staff in their youth. The limited staff turnover at camp makes it increasingly important to question whether the experiences that staff had as campers are worth passing forward to the next generation.

Summer camp fits all of the six principles that Foucault (1984) attributes to spaces he describes as “heterotopia”. Summer camp is (1) a sacred space for youth, (2) which is constantly changing to fit the needs of society, (3) brings lessons and representations of many parts of life to one arena, (4) occupies a temporal, liminal space in time, (5) is only open to a select age of participants during the months of summer, and (6) serves the function of connecting youth with

nature and each other. The place summer camp holds as a heterotopia is valuable for teaching youth, but I have found in reading about summer camps and more generally about outdoor education that this valuable space is also, as Foucault would suggest, a site of power. Left unquestioned, power relations will reconstitute themselves and summer camps will miss the mark on their potential as sites of meaningful social change. Summer camps often act as a rite of passage that connects adolescents with each other and nature through environmental and adventure programming (Bell, 2003). However there are also systemic problems with my camp and others, which I will outline below using the romantic notion of wilderness as a focal point to these troubles. By fixing these problems and rethinking our relationship with wilderness I believe that summer camps can better realize their potential. As heterotopias, summer camps provide the perfect environment to teach youth social and natural connection while advocating social and environmental justice; but first we must address the ways they are opposing those movements.

### **Research Statement**

Sleepaway summer camps are often pivotal experiences for participants and staff, exposing them to remote natural spaces for the first time. These experiences have the potential to shape the values and behaviours of people far into their adult life (Bell, 2003; Tanner, 1980). Historically, summer camps have roots in organized religion, colonization of Indigenous populations, promotion of gender norms, and cultural appropriation (Wall, 2009; Van Slyck, 2010). Summer camp trips can perpetuate a sense of separation between people and their natural surroundings if they are presented as an experience that is only accessible in remote settings, separated from the city where many participants call home. They also have the potential to strengthen ties to nature and illustrate the interconnectedness of humans with nature. This creates an underlying paradox of summer camps. Summer camps use culturally appropriated practices

from Indigenous peoples in order to re-connect children with the land. This is done in a setting whose very creation is part of a system that is separating Indigenous peoples from the land. *How do summer camp experiences shape individuals' ideas of the value of "wilderness" spaces? What is the potential for thinking about "wilderness" at summer camps ways that create connection between people and nature?*

The current model of summer camps and outdoor education are rooted in historic systems of social inequality and separation between people and nature. Ironically, our attempts to create social and environmental connection through adventure and environmental education at summer camps are part of what is separating people through a lack of diversity and separating people from nature through a dichotomous view of wilderness spaces. In this thesis, I will introduce the history of wilderness space and outdoor education in North America. Then, I will present the problems with this view of space and how it is acting to separate people from each other and nature. Lastly, I will suggest alternatives to the current presentations of space and program at summer camp that can create more connections and help summer camp realize its potential to enact change in a postmodern world.

### **Historic Notions of Wilderness and Outdoor Education**

Wilderness spaces play a huge role in the programming at summer camps, but there are many problems with the way these spaces are presented. The biggest trouble with wilderness is that campers come with pre-existing views of wilderness. The historic attachment of notions of wilderness to the frontier has created a lasting colonial narrative within outdoor recreation and education, wherein the wilderness has become a space to build youth into the next generation of pioneers and impart them with the character traits to succeed in a colonial landscape. This frontier history of wilderness has had a lasting impact on the programming of outdoor education

and the type of connections built at summer camp; the social connections built at camp rely on a privileged notion of adventure and environmental connections are centered on a romantic view of wild untouched nature preserved for recreation. Before unpacking the troubles with wilderness and outdoor education it is important to understand the history of these spaces. In this section, we will set the stage for current wilderness education at summer camps.

As a kid at summer camp, I got my first introduction to and appreciation for wilderness. I had been car camping with my family, but never really been to places without road access; never to places where I needed to spend the day hiking or boating under my own power to arrive there. From my very first week at camp, at six years old, we hiked into the woods with nothing but what we could carry, and spent a night under a tarp that we put up ourselves. As I got older I learned to cook meals, plan the route, and slowly gained the skills and experience to lead the trips myself. Camp brought me places where I could feel alone in the universe. Looking up at a sky full of stars on a remote hiking trip in Strathcona Park, I remember feeling the weight of my insignificance with a simultaneous feeling of accomplishment from overcoming a challenging day of hiking. In seventeen summers at camp, I have had a lot of time to connect with the wilderness and find benefits to the escape it offers. This experience made it particularly unsettling for me to explore the history of wilderness and summer camps, and the impact of this ontology of space, particularity on Indigenous peoples.

It is common practice at summer camps and in outdoor education to present the natural spaces that we facilitate our programs as wilderness. When I was a camper, there was even a section at my camp called “wilderness”. This program took youth aged 14-15 on a week-long hike or sea kayak trip. Wilderness is still how we refer to the settings of our hike, canoe, and kayak trips. We go on these trips with the intention of experiencing wilderness as the Wilderness



Act defines it: a place where “man himself is a visitor who does not remain” (Nash, 1973, p. 5). Wilderness is used by summer camp as a space to escape civilization, in order to better connect with nature and each other. The problem with teaching youth to connect with wilderness as a liminal space is that it allows that connection to be left behind when returning to civilization. Placing youth in a different environment to create connections to nature risks a loss of learning transfer when participants return to their home environments and allows the wilderness to be a romantic notion to be preserved not for its own intrinsic value but only for the value it holds as a space for recreation (Rose & Paisley, 2012; Cronon, 1996). Preserving wilderness for recreation is better than some of the historic western view of wilderness in which the wild was a savage enemy to be conquered and destroyed (Nash, 1973), but that history impacts our current relationship with nature and has created a separation we feel today. If summer camps want to foster connection to nature, we need to deeply assess the value of our attachment to a romantic notion of “virgin” wilderness.

### **History of Wilderness**

There have always been, and continue to be, many ways of knowing wild and natural spaces. Eastern Religions, for example, have for a long time deified natural spaces and seen wilderness as a space to connect with the gods. In the east, “[m]an was understood to be a part of nature” (Nash, 1973, pg. 20). It took much longer for western views of nature to include people. Nash identifies that western perspectives on wilderness are rooted in a view of wild places being supernatural and monstrous. For the Hebrews, wilderness was a place apart from civilization because it was arid desert land. This space was so deadly that wilderness gained a religious connotation as a space to be feared, where survival was difficult. Christians saw progress and success from the destruction of forests and wilderness. St. Francis Assisi was “the exception that

proves the rule” among medieval Christians; when Assisi preached that man was of nature and not above it, and that wild animals contain a soul, he was called a heretic and shunned (Nash, 1973, pg. 19).

Wall (2009) points out that “Europeans who colonized the New World were certainly no nature-lovers; they brought with them fundamentally Judeo-Christian notions of wild spaces as hostile and alien, wilderness regions to be tamed and subdued by the artful human hand” (p. 6). Wilderness was the enemy of the pioneer, which needed to be cultivated and turned into civilization (Nash, 1973). Nash argues that “the North American continent prior to settlement serves as an example [of untouched wilderness]. It was immense in area, and its Indians were regarded as a form of wildbeast [wild beast] whose savageness was consistent with the character of the wild country” (p. 7). This view of pre-European contact North America and Indigenous peoples is a prime example of the role wilderness plays in settler colonialism. Because Indigenous peoples were seen as a part of the wilderness, their assimilation or destruction was a part of the colonial project of cultivating the wild (Wolfe, 2007). The wilderness and the Indigenous peoples who lived within these spaces were viewed as being separate from settlers, and both were enemies to be conquered (Nash, 1973). While this view of wilderness has changed over time, it has greatly impacted the creation of summer camps and the preservation of spaces for outdoor recreation. Wilderness is still viewed as a space that we can venture into as we reconnect with nature and disconnect from the fast pace of society. Summer camps emerged to let youth experience the wilderness and hold onto this separation which had been so vital to the breaking of the frontier in North America.

## **The Role of the Frontier in Separating Nature and Culture**

As the wilderness was cultivated and civilized, attachment to the remaining vestiges of wilderness grew. The animosity towards wilderness as the adversary of the “good” pioneer, and the enemy of colonial expansion in the new world was transformed into a romantic deification of pristine wild spaces by writers such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Robert Marshall, and Aldo Leopold (Nash, 1973). By the late 19th century in North America it was “fashionable to think of nature as benevolent and health-giving, [even though] such a stance represented a reversal of centuries of thinking about the human relationship to the natural world.” (Wall, 2009, p. 6). Turner (1893) took a slightly different angle on the value of wilderness and nature, attributing the strength of America to the forging of civilization from the wild frontier. He called for the preservation of the frontier to protect the American pioneer spirit through the protection of land as parks, and the maintenance of skills needed to live off the land.

This period marked a shifting point in how wilderness was viewed in America (Nash, 1973). The advent of the National Parks system in North America was one way in which the land was separated from civilization and preserved as wilderness. Parks present themselves as “virgin” uninhabited land, but their creation “followed hard on the heels of the final Indian wars, in which the prior human inhabitants of these areas were rounded up and moved onto reservations” (Cronon, 1996, p. 15). In the Canadian Rockies for example, the National Parks are now Meccas for adventure and outdoor recreation and the backyard of many summer camps. However, these parks were created through systematic dispossession from Indigenous peoples, who were barred from traditional hunting, gathering, and cultural practices in these spaces (Youdelis, 2016; Mason, 2008). Indigenous people’s cultures were used to attract tourists to the area (Mason, 2008), but they were simultaneously being erased from artists representations of

the wild landscape to present these spaces in ways that attracted wealthy people into the “wilderness” for outdoor recreation (Jessup, 2002). Parks are part of the settler colonial project of preserving the frontier and the frontier era separation between settler and Indigenous people and the natural environment.

The protection of the frontier through the creation of parks preserved a view of settlers as separate from the land with the authority to own and cultivate the bare wilderness and a view of Indigenous peoples as savage and wild, a part of the wilderness that could be civilized through assimilation and colonization (Cronon, 1987). Gregory (2001) argues that the creation of wilderness areas is part of an ongoing colonial project, in which the colonizer goes about normalizing European landscapes and othering different spaces to separate nature from culture and commodify both. If wilderness was ever fully vanquished as the enemy of the pioneer, it would be an act of self-destruction, because “[i]n the myth of the vanishing frontier lay the seeds of wilderness preservation in the United States, for if wild land had been so crucial in the making of the nation, then surely one must save its last remnants as monuments to the American past and as an insurance policy to protect its future” (Cronon, 1996, p. 13). Summer camps are part of this frontier preservation.

### **Summer Camps and the Frontier Character**

Summer camps are the perfect venue in Canada and America to protect the ‘vanishing’ frontier by passing on a pioneer ethic from generation to generation. If this preservation of the frontier is not made obvious enough with section names like “Explorer”, “Pioneer”, and “Outpost”, Abigail Van Slyck, a historian who studies summer camping in the United States, makes the connection clear. Speaking about the first summer camps in the late 19th century, she says,

“[Frederick Jackson Turner] argued that the frontier had closed, that the process of westward migration was complete. He also argued that this was a problem because the frontier experience was what had made Americans particularly strong. On the frontier, they had wrested territory from Native Americans, broken the wilderness for agriculture, built their farms and towns from scratch, and generally worked really hard. From Turner's perspective, the process was responsible for strengthening the American character, for tempering it in the same way that steel gets tempered.

Turner's frontier thesis (as it is called) ignited a bit of a panic. Many people wondered what was going to happen to the American character without that tempering experience. Really important issues like national identity were at stake and some began to ask, "How are we going to replace the frontier? How can we supply future generations with the wilderness experience?" One answer was the summer camp.” (2011, p. 30)

The creation of summer camps was deeply seeded with the fabrication of wilderness and the preservation of the frontier as cultural imaginaries. Frontier preservation has entrenched a view of wilderness onto the landscape of North America wherein nature is kept separate from civilization as a space to reconnect with the land. This conceptualization of wilderness has created a separation between nature and culture, which is upheld today by summer camps and other “back-to-nature” movements, even though they attempt to advocate for a reconnection with the land (Castree & Braun, 1998).

The romance of a rustic pioneer life may sometimes seem like a distant memory, but I still see this pioneer ethic present in my work. The most obvious lasting connection to the frontier is the names of some of the sections at my camp mentioned above, “Explorers”, “Pioneers”, and “Outpost”. These ways of organizing campers and assigning identity-based groupings embeds campers (and camp) in a settler colonial narrative and structure.

Another, more subtle example of the ongoing attachment to the frontier at camp came this summer when I was on a sea kayak trip. We arrived at our campsite in Echo Bay and a local man offered our group a tour of a hand built cabin on a neighboring piece of land. The man was impressed by our self-propelled trip and wanted to show the participants an example of where

this frontier exploring ethic and character had taken his friend, who build a cabin alone in the woods. The focus of the tour was on the limited use of the comforts of civilization to build the cabin and how that was an admirable task to undertake. This reminded me of how camp often presents the suffering of experiencing the wilderness as a valuable part of character building, when sometimes it is what prevents youth from wanting to experience nature again in the future (Rose & Paisley, 2012; Warren, 2012) or makes them continue to see wilderness as a threat to be conquered. The attachment within wilderness education to the preservation of the frontier continues to affect the values passed on at summer camps and the type of character that we are building. The narrative of wilderness spaces as character building and the perpetuation of a pioneer ethic that was going on in settler ideas of wilderness in North American underwent a significant transformation in the 1960s when Kurt Hahn's outdoor education philosophy was imported from Europe by Joshua Miner of Colorado Outward Bound School.

### **Adventure Education to Affect Character**

The outdoor recreation and wilderness preservation movement of the early 20th century set the stage for formal modern outdoor education, and by 1962 when Outward Bound was brought to America, the dominant culture of America viewed wilderness space as worth preservation for future generations' recreation (Nash, 1973; Watters, 1985). The major shift that Kurt Hahn brought to outdoor education with Outward Bound was the use of risk and adventure to promote character building (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993). At Camp Thunderbird, we still talk about Hahn's educational philosophy during our staff training and its relevance today. The "social diseases" that Hahn identified in during WWII, when he founded Outward Bound as a sailing program to teach survival and life skills to merchant sailors (Watters, 1985, Hopkins & Putnam, 1993), still form the foundation of the Camp Thunderbird philosophy for outdoor

adventure education. Outward Bound's goal was to teach "attitudes, appreciation, understanding, and expression rather than the mastery of techniques and bodies of factual information" (Lewis, 1969, pg. 33). The program was built to counter the following declines in society or "social diseases" that Kurt Hahn claimed modern civilization had caused:

- A decline in physical fitness due to modern methods of transportation,
- A decline in initiative or enterprise due to a social tendency towards being a spectator rather than participator,
- A decline in the individual's memory and imagination because of confusion and restlessness in modern life,
- A decline in skills and care because traditions of craftsmanship had diminished,
- A decline in self-discipline from an over-reliance upon ubiquitous stimulants and tranquilizers, and
- A decline in human compassion because of the hurried lifestyle inherent to a modern lifestyle" (Nicholas, 2017).

Hahn's educational philosophy and the Outward Bound program were built to combat these social diseases caused by modernity. His idea, which camps and outdoor education programs still uphold, was that if outdoor adventure could instill positive values in youth, they could stop the declines in general society.

Caught up in the anti-modernist movement following WWII, Outward Bound, summer camps, and other outdoor education movements were formed in opposition to the "individualism, anthropocentrism, patriarchy, mechanization, economism, consumerism, nationalism, and materialism" that are associated with modernity (Griffin, 1988). Adventure programming was Hahn's way of stimulating participants to learn positive values in place of the social declines he

had witnessed. Life skills adventure programs like Outward Bound or out trips at summer camp focus on developing communication, decision making, problem solving, relationship and self-esteem building and maintenance, responsibility, preventing abuse, and other behavioural skills (Hamburg, 1990; Krazier, 1990) by placing a group of youth into a remote setting where they must rely on one another to achieve group goals. A participant at summer camp can learn life skills by overcoming challenges and realizing their own potential to manage risks.

Priest and Gass (2005) argue that adventure education helps participants learn life skills through three levels of learning transfer. The lowest level is specific transfer of skills, such as knot tying, from one activity to another. Next is non-specific transfer of a process, such as transferring trust learned in rock climbing to trust in an interpersonal conversation. The highest level is a metaphoric transfer of a similar process, such as the first step over the ledge in a rappel to the first steps in a new job. By transferring learning from positive, calculated risk-taking, adventure education teaches participants how to measure, mitigate, reduce, and/or retain everyday risks.

While the risk of a sedentary lifestyle or disconnection from nature are often used to justify adventure programs, a focus on physical risks can be alienating to participants for whom being in remote nature is already challenging (Warren, 2012). In many cases this means that the children who are living in urban poverty and may be the most disconnected from natural spaces feel that outdoor adventures are unwelcoming, as they remind participants of their lived experiences with daily poverty (Warren, 2012; Wall 2009). It is unappealing to go “back to nature” to experience “challenge” when daily life is challenge enough. Rose and Paisley (2012) support the argument that experiential education is more welcoming to privileged people, who “may appreciate many of the traditional challenges and pedagogies of experiential education



because we are more likely to live free from many everyday structural challenges, such as institutionalized racism, sexism, ghettoism, classism, ageism, and similar forms of othering taking place through discourses surrounding various minoritized and marginalized populations” (p. 144). For summer camps to address social justice issues such as urban poverty by connecting youth in poverty with natural space and each other through risk, they need to carefully frame these experiences in a way that creates a base level of comfort before exposure to additional challenge.

At Camp Thunderbird, we encourage “challenge by choice” philosophy to risk. When talking about risk with participants, we describe the “challenge donut”. The comfort zone is the area inside the donut, the challenge zone is the doughy goodness of the pastry, and the panic zone is the space outside the donut, where you have taken too much risk. Every person’s “challenge donut” is different, so at an activity like rock climbing, one person may get to the top and still be in their comfort zone while another participant is challenged just by putting on a harness. By framing adventure experiences as a step outside of a participant’s comfort zone, there is an expectation for staff and participants to return to comfort at the end of the adventure. Reiterating this challenge by choice philosophy helps frame adventure experiences for their intended purpose, to challenge, not induce panic.

The changes that Kurt Hahn brought to North American outdoor education in the 1960s continue to affect the type of character that is being built by modern adventure education (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993). The attachment to the frontier that prompted the initial creation of outdoor recreation and education organizations such as summer camps and scouts quickly adapted to encompass more adventure and focus on learning from risk exposure and mitigation. All of this focus on risk and challenge to create social growth in adventure education is

emphasized by the challenge of surviving in the adverse conditions of the wilderness. This is a perpetuation of the survivalism originally passed on at camp with a focus on preserving the frontier. Without proper attention to creating a culture of “challenge by choice”, the focus on challenge and risk can make summer camps and outdoor education an unwelcoming space to participants who face daily challenge in their life at home. The focus on risk within adventure can also result in nature becoming backdrop to build character (Hanna, 1995), rather than a space to build natural and social connection.

### **Environmental Education to Connect with Nature**

A greater shift within outdoor education came when programs started to focus on connecting participants with nature. When concern arose in the 1970s in North America that youth were growing up detached from nature, there was an increased focus within outdoor education on ekistic and ecosystemic relationships in an attempt to teach youth about relationships between humans and nature (Lynch, 1977; Hart, 1979). This concern grew at a similar time to the growth of adventure education. Within outdoor education, Priest (1986) acknowledges that adventure and environmental education serve different purposes and have developed as separate but connected programs. The historic separation of the branches of adventure and environmental education within outdoor education continue to affect many programs today, which specialize in or focus on one area (Hanna, 1995). Hanna (1995) suggests that there is a need for more environmental education in adventure programs, which often use natural settings as the platform for social learning without protecting that natural setting. I agree with her call for increased environmental education at summer camps.

Baker (2005) supports the idea that summer camps and adventure education programs need to promote environmental connection and stewardship. She says that “it may be assumed

that the environment plays an integral role in adventure-based programming simply because it is there. Oftentimes, however, the land becomes a backdrop surrounding the adventure experience” (p. 269). Outdoor adventure pursuits rely on a healthy environment, but can fail to encourage preservation of nature or teach about our own reliance on ecosystems (Hanna, 1995), whereas environmental education functions to promote the conservation movement by teaching students about interconnectedness of living things, which helps them develop stewardship for the land (Lewis, 1969; Kirk, 1968). Learning this land ethic at an early age establishes a positive trajectory to live harmoniously with nature throughout one’s life. Louv (2005) argues that children are now developing mental health disorders from being kept away from natural spaces and has coined the term “nature-deficit disorder” to describe this phenomena. Summer camps are a key place to combat nature-deficit disorder through exposure to nature and by teaching kids that it is fun and beneficial to play outside (Mutz, & Müller, 2016).

I had always thought that connecting participants with nature was an inherent part of outdoor education based on the setting, but I have since found that is not intrinsic to the program. Most of the programming at camp is focused on interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. The environmental education programming at camp is mostly a promotion of natural connection through exposure. We teach leave-no-trace and other forms of environmental stewardship, which Van Slyck (2011) points out was not always the case at camp; stewardship was slowly introduced to the program at summer camps out of necessity to keep the sites from becoming junkyards. This approach to programming fits with the predominant goal of environmental education, which is "the maintenance of a varied, beautiful, and resource-rich planet for future generations" (Tanner, 1980, pg. 20). At camp this is mostly done informally. Through exposure and conversation, campers learn about natural relationships, with and without human, that Priest

(1986) says makes up the environmental education branch of outdoor education. They also learn about ecological concepts and environmental issues to promote environmental activism, which is a key part of environmental education (Roth, 1969; Hanna, 1995). But, in my experience, all of this is still second to the social learning at camp. At the end of the day, I am much more likely to debrief an interpersonal conflict between two campers than explain the conflict between Indigenous people and fish farms because of the impact of sea lice.

### **The Connection of Adventure and Environmental Education**

Independently, adventure and environmental education offer a range of experiences to help students learn; however, they are best used in conjunction with each other through a joint outdoor education program. Because social relationships, both interpersonal and intrapersonal, are the focus of adventure education, the natural setting can be overlooked. Hanna (1995) and Priest (1986) call for an increase in ecological and environmental education in adventure programs in order to preserve the very environment upon which adventure activities rely. Nicholas (2017) points out that while outdoor education is described by Hanna (1995) and Priest (1986) as being split into a dichotomy of adventure and environmental education, “perhaps ... this dichotomy ... is not quite exact, for there could not be a split in something that has never actually converged successfully”. Whether they split or never truly merged, an effective outdoor education program should integrate both methods of education to teach students about relationships concerning people and natural resources. Dewey, a founder of the pedagogy of experiential education, thought that subjects should not be learned in isolation, but rather through direct experience and reflection (Breunig, 2005). This pedagogy has been adapted by modern outdoor education programs since their inception, focusing on extracting learning about social and environmental relationships from experiences in the outdoors.

Summer camps are starting to integrate adventure and environmental education, but there is still work to do. One of the biggest problems in the current model for outdoor education at summer camps is the preservation of the romantic notion of wilderness as a space for recreation. This separation creates a focus of environmental efforts on the protection of spaces that are valuable for recreation while ignoring the ways that environmental racism impacts marginalized groups (Cronon, 1996). In order for outdoor education to support and educate youth about environmental justice it must recognize the interconnectivity of social and environmental issues. Integrating adventure and environmental education helps participants recognize the connection between social and natural relationships. Social justice and environmental justice are not problems that can be solved separately and our education systems need to acknowledge them as interrelated (Gruenwald, 2005). Studies have shown that adventure oriented spaces, such as summer camps, which are focused on personal and social growth, also contribute to children developing a connection to nature (San Jose & Nelson, 2017). By teaching youth how to build sustainable social and natural relationships at the same time, summer camps can bridge the dichotomy of nature and culture that have been separated by the idea of wilderness.

The separation of culture and nature that dominates western views of natural spaces has been passed down from generation to generation through the frontier notions of the wilderness as a space to conquer or preserve. This separation continues through adventure education which pits participants against the risks and challenges of the natural environment. While the integration of environmental education in summer camp programs has tempered the dichotomy created by the notion of wilderness and its use in outdoor education, the connections to nature created through environmental education are often still of a romantic pristine nature. These visions of untouched

nature do not leave space for human use of natural resources or cultural connection to nature. This leaves a troubling lack of space for humans to live within nature (Cronon, 1996).

### **The Troubles with Wilderness**

With an understanding of the historic contexts of wilderness and outdoor education, we can begin to explore the troubles with wilderness at summer camps. The notion of wilderness continues to impact the way that nature is referenced in western society. Nature is seen as a remote space that one must venture to rather than a part of everyday life. The separation created by the notion of wilderness has had lasting impacts on Indigenous people whose cultural connection to natural spaces does not include such a division. The presentation of wilderness at summer camps has made camp spaces more welcoming individuals who identify with the cultural norms of wilderness. In this section we will unpack the problems with wilderness at summer camp and discuss the way it is distancing people from nature. These problems create the foundation for why summer camps need to rethink their attachment to romantic notions of untouched wilderness and present alternative narrative that unsettle wilderness.

### **The Separation of Nature and Culture**

Summer camps are deeply entwined with the popularization of modern outdoor education as a response to the project of modernity. This project of modernization separates humans from nature to further civilization (Nash, 1973); the “[advancement] of modern European culture was measured by its distance from nature” (Gregory, 2001, p. 87). For previous generations, “their ability to master nature, to increase their distance from it, was considered to be precisely what made them human” (Wall, 2009, p. 251). Now, because of this increased distance from nature, “as modern people we are out of touch with nature” (p. 251). This separation created the foundation for the rise of outdoor education and programs designed to connect youth with nature,

but the dichotomy between nature and culture in the way we talk about wilderness continues to undermine efforts to reconnect.

Aldo Leopold (1949) argues that the separation caused by modernization has reached the point of “landlessness”, where our culture is so separated from the land that we do not recognize the separation. From Leopold’s natural realist perspective, nature is the root of culture, and we need to reconnect our modern urban populations with nature for the benefit of the people and the land. From this perspective it is easy to see the solution to the problem of landlessness as solvable through the creation of summer camps, parks, and wilderness spaces for recreation, as these places will get the increasingly urban populations “back to nature” (Nash, 1973; Wall, 2009).

Other authors argue that nature is a social construction, and criticize the natural realists’ perspective that culture emerged from nature. Cronon (1996) points to the idea of wilderness as the root of the landlessness problem, arguing that “only people whose relation to the land was already alienated could hold up wilderness as a model for human life in nature, for the romantic ideology of wilderness leaves precisely nowhere for human beings actually to make their living from the land” (p. 17). This is a classic social constructionist argument about how “there is nothing natural about the concept of wilderness” (Cronon, p. 16). From this perspective, one can never get “back to nature” because the “separations between ‘culture’ and ‘nature’ are fabrications [and they] become undone precisely because they have always been conjoined” (Gregory, 2001, p. 107). From a social constructionist view, glorifying wilderness only separates people from nature, and summer camps are part of this project. By presenting nature as a space that we go to escape the hustle and bustle of civilization, rather than a part of our everyday lives, summer camps are contributing to the separation between people and nature, which they are

trying to mend. Camp out trips are an experience where this separation is amplified. On trip, campers leave the main site of camp to further their escape from civilization and further their connection with nature and each other. The escape offered by outtrip also furthers the separation from civilization and culture.

Both natural realist and social constructionists present nature and culture as a binary. Castree and MacMillan (2001) take the position that “both social constructionists and those natural realist they criticize... [are unable] to imagine human-nature relations in a nondichotomous way” (p. 210) and offer the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as an alternative to the “society-nature dichotomy [which is] a posthoc attempt by analysts to oversimplify complexity” (p. 212). In ANT, humans are part of cultural and natural relationships and networks, which intricately interact with each other. Instead of trying to simplify the relationship between people and nature, ANT embraces the complexity. Humans are part of social and natural networks. Our actions impact nature as much as natural forces impact us. I believe that this vision of human-nature relations does the best job at presenting the complicated ways that people are connected to and disconnected from nature.

### **The Impact of Wilderness on Indigenous Peoples**

For Indigenous peoples in Canada, the separations of a dichotomous view of nature and culture were imposed through the cultural genocide of residential schools. This separation continues to have an unjust effect on their way of life. The above discussions about the human-nature relationship fail to take into account the way that settler separations of nature and culture impact Indigenous peoples. This relationship is an especially important consideration with the current focus on reconciliation in Canada. Kawagley, a Yupiaq scholar, illuminates the incommensurability to Indigenous people of viewing culture and nature as separate. He says that



“[w]e know that Mother Nature has a culture, and it is a Native culture” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 30; citing Kawagley, 2010, p. xiii). Elsey (2013) calls the connection felt by Indigenous people of British Columbia to the land *enfoldment* with the fabric of one’s body, where “the notion of self is not an individual self but a collective self which encompasses all of [one’s] experiences within a given context of terrestrial social action, which in the case of First Nations can be explained as the tribal territory” (p. 9). From an Indigenous perspective, land is viewed as “more than a site upon which humans make history or as a location that accumulates history” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 30; citing Goeman, 2008, p. 24). Instead, land is an integral part of each person and each person’s experience is a part of the land (Wa & Uukw, 1989). This view is completely contrary to the idea of wilderness as an empty landscape, void of human culture, which we can return to through outdoor recreation or a summer camp experience in an attempt to satiate our hunger for natural connection.

The settler idea of wilderness as an empty space where “man is a visitor” (Nash, 1973, p.5) has had huge impacts on Indigenous peoples. Wilderness spaces were preserved for settler use through the active dispossession of land from Indigenous peoples through the creation of parks (Youdelis, 2016; Mason, 2008; Cronon, 1996; Nash, 1973; McAvoy, McDonald, & Carlson, 2003). The idea of wilderness as “empty” and “untouched” is part of the ongoing dispossession of land from Indigenous peoples. Presenting land as wilderness until it is civilized creates a legal landscape in North America where Indigenous peoples must prove continual occupation and use of land in order to reclaim rights and title. The Tsilhqot’in (2014) decision by the Supreme Court of Canada demonstrates the difficulty in proving continued occupation. While this case gives hope to other First Nations, such as the Nuchatlaht Nation on the west coast of Vancouver Island who have filed an Aboriginal-title case using the Tsilhqot’in case as

precedent (Pawson, 2017; Petrescu, 2017), it does not address the difference in perspective towards land between settlers and Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples must not only prove a cultural connection to land to disprove the wilderness narrative, but also must legitimize their cultural connection within a settler colonial discursive and legal frameworks.

This difference in perspective was demonstrated recently when Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) sided with the government of British Columbia in a ruling that Qat'muk, where the Ktunaxa Nation believe the Grizzly Bear Spirit lives. The SCC ruled the land is not protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and therefore is open to development as a ski resort (Platt, 2017). The ruling declared that "in short, the charter protects the freedom to worship, but does not protect the spiritual focal point of worship" (Ktunaxa Nation v. British Columbia, 2017). This is an example of ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples from the land through a dominant ideological binary view of nature and culture. The Ktunaxa Nation cannot use the same means as the Xeni Gwet'in Nation in reclaiming land because their connection to Qat'muk relies on it remaining undisturbed by humans. Their spiritual connection to this space has kept it untouched and now it is viewed as a wilderness, void of human connection and perfect for outdoor recreation. This is not a large shift from early pioneers' goal to "replace the savage yell with the songs of Zion" (Nash, 1973, pg. 42). This court case is an example of the ways the current state of settler colonialism disappears an Indigenous spiritual connection to nature with a western way of appreciating nature through recreation and commodification.

The rights of outdoor recreationalist to develop Qat'muk for skiing are the same rights that summer camps have to operate on traditional territories of Indigenous peoples. Summer camps and outdoor recreation operate under the pretense of connecting people with nature. But, by perpetuating a romantic vision of untouched wilderness, they are part of the ongoing settler

colonial project that dispossesses Indigenous peoples of their cultural connection to the land. This systematic dispossession reaches back to the development of National Parks (Youdelis, 2016; Mason, 2008; Cronon, 1996; Nash, 1973; McAvoy, McDonald, & Carlson, 2003), and is difficult to oppose, as evidenced by the Tsilhqot'in (2014) SCC decision. For meaningful decolonization to take place, outdoor education programs need to both let go of the idea of wilderness, which is part of the western dichotomy separating people from nature and contributes to the dispossession of Indigenous rights, title, and cultural connection on the land, and call the land what it is, unceded territory. I will talk more about acknowledging unceded territory more below, but I first want to acknowledge the other action that summer camps have been active in and has negatively impacted Indigenous people.

### **Cultural Appropriation**

Perpetuating the romantic notion of wilderness as a space for recreation is not the only act of colonialism at summer camps that has impacted Indigenous peoples. Camps have a long history of cultural appropriation and perpetuating an idealization of the “romantic savage” (Wall, 2009). Looking at my own experience at summer camp, I am baffled by how far we have come from “playing Indian”, and acutely aware of how far we still have to go in reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. It is easy to look at my generation of summer camping and think that we are the generation that has figured out how to stop appropriating native culture. In my time at camp the cabin names were changed so that they were no longer the mispronounced and misspelled names of BC First Nations, we started to acknowledge the traditional territory of the T'Sou-Ke Nation, and totem poles obviously carved and erected by White Euro-Canadians were respectfully decommissioned. But other aspects of camp have been slower to change.

One striking example of the resistance to change at camps is the reaction I got when I pointed out that a painting, in a native style, but of unknown origin, was hanging upside down. I was told that it “looks like it is smiling that way” with the mouth curved up, even with the eyes at the bottom of the painting and hands at the top. Another controversial painting at camp hangs above the fireplace in the dining hall. It depicts two men dancing in Indigenous masks around a fire. The painting is on a roll of paper, and looks like it is from around the 1980s. It is hard to tell if this painting is meant to be depicting Native dancers or white camp staff impersonating them. In either case, the painting perfectly reflects the settler colonial roots of my camp, but also seems out of context in its current position. While both these paintings are a part of the camp’s history, if interpreted incorrectly, they can easily perpetuate a misunderstanding of First Nations culture. The fact that they are continually questioned and yet remain in their current position reflects the way that summer camp’s past and current approach to engaging with Indigenous people is figuratively and literally upside down.

Wall (2009) gives a great explanation of the cultural appropriation of Indigenous cultures at summer camp in the last chapter of the book *The Nurture of Nature*. This chapter looks at the phenomena of “playing Indian” and “going Native”. Wall argues that “playing Indian” was just one of many acts of resistance against the growing modernity of urban life in Ontario. This return to “savagery” was seen as a necessary step for youth in their growth and development, and part of the “back to nature” experience. This impulse to “go Native” reflected a desire for more community, spirituality, and belonging within a natural environment and had lasting impacts on the youth whom attended the camps. This use of “Indian” culture was done in a way that ignored the diversity of Indigenous peoples. Wall’s overall argument about Ontario summer camps from 1920-1955 holds true for BC summer camps today. Even the name of my camp, Camp

Thunderbird, appropriates a First Nation story of the Thunderbird and places it out of context. The disease of urban modernity cannot be escaped by simply going “back to nature”. The use of Indigenous culture to escape the modern places these cultures in the past and fails to recognize modern Indigenous cultures and the ways that they have changed over time. Summer camps attempts to resist modernity have resulted in the misrepresentation and appropriation of Native culture.

The problem that we currently face in outdoor education and summer camping is that in our attempts to remove the appropriation and misrepresentation of Indigenous people, we have stopped engaging with the topic. Root (2010) identifies that environmental education is critically lacking Indigenous perspectives, even though this pedagogy parallels the educational philosophy of Indigenous societies. Misguided attempts in the past to reflect the parallels between outdoor education and Indigenous cultures led to appropriation and resulted in generalizations about First Nations people rather than understanding. If summer camps want to demonstrate the connections between environmental and Indigenous education it needs to be done with respectful and ongoing engagement of local communities.

### **Reconciliation**

If summer camps want to repair the damaging impact to Indigenous peoples, in which we have been complicit to or actively involved, the first step is reconciliation. Reconciliation is about creating a working future in settler colonial nations where settler and Indigenous peoples can live together harmoniously. I first want to acknowledge the critiques of reconciliation being incommensurable with decolonization because reconciliation works to normalize settler presence and preserve a settler future, while decolonization is only accountable to creating Indigenous sovereignty (Tuck & Yang, 2012). While I agree that it is troubling to imagine that reconciliation

can be used to sidestep Indigenous sovereignty and hold onto a future for settler colonialism, I believe that reconciliation is the best first step towards decolonization in settler colonial nations such as Canada.

We have inherited an impossible task, but it is our job to mend the hurts that we can, no matter how much time they take to heal. I like the way that Cullis-Suzuki (2017) frames “[r]econciliation [as] an ongoing process, and if we are truly committed to it, we must welcome engagement with awkward and difficult situations that must be rectified”. Talking about reconciliation as an ongoing process highlights how it is indefinite. I know that within my lifetime we will not solve the damage caused by generations of trauma to Indigenous peoples, but we can take steps to reveal the constructions of settler colonialism and acknowledge alternatives. One construction of settler colonialism that must be deconstructed is the idea of wilderness, another is the appropriation and misrepresentation of Indigenous culture.

For meaningful reconciliation to take place, settlers need to open their minds and start conversations about the interconnectedness of the colonization of land and the colonization of people (Root, 2010). Summer camp is a great place to start these conversations. Framing wilderness as a space where “man is a visitor” is an act of colonization disguised as a return-to-nature. Wildernesses have direct impact on Indigenous peoples when that wilderness was created to preserve frontier ideals by removing the original inhabitants as is the case in the settler colonial nations such as Canada and the United States (Gregory, 2001; Wall, 2009; Mason, 2008; Youdelis, 2016). These remote and pristine notions of wilderness act to alienate all humans from nature by distancing nature from culture (Cronon, 1996; Castree & Braun, 1998). The idea of wilderness goes against many Indigenous peoples notion of enfoldment and Native culture, which draw connections between people and the environment (Elsey, 2013; Kawagley, 2010).

Creating a dominant colonial discourse where land is property or wilderness makes it easy to trample Indigenous ontologies of space and ignore Indigenous land rights. It is only by unsettling the idea of wilderness that summer camps can engage in the ongoing process of reconciliation. Below I will suggest alternatives to the notion of wilderness that are already available and being used in outdoor education such as looking for wildness in our everyday interactions with nature rather than finding remote and pristine environments for recreation (Cronon, 1996), connecting meaningfully to nature through landfullness (Baker, 2005), and acknowledging the territories that we are occupying (Cullis-Suzuki). These alternatives are important to the process of reconciliation. But first I want to examine more problems with the current presentation of wilderness at summer camps and the way it impacts groups other than Indigenous peoples.

### **How Identity Affects Connection to Wilderness**

Indigenous peoples' relationships with the land are heavily impacted by settler ideas of wilderness and the separation of culture and nature that it shapes. But Indigenous peoples are not the only people impacted by the way wilderness and nature are represented in society. The way that individuals connect with natural space is impacted by their identity, and the historic exclusion of people based on identity has had lasting effects on current outdoor culture. The history of wilderness and outdoor education favours participants and leaders who are "white, male, middle/upper-class, [and] able-bodied" (Warren et al., 2014, pg. 89). As someone who currently feels welcome within outdoor culture and recognizes that there are representations of space that make some people feel welcome and others feel rejected, I feel a duty to reduce the barriers to connecting with nature that are imposed by the presentation of wilderness in outdoor education.

Identity and personal connection to space differs from individual to individual and summer camp will never find a presentation of space that matches the views of every individual. This does not mean we should give up the quest to find ways of representing space at summer camp to make more people feel welcome. Gender and race are two of many factors that continue to impact the inclusion people feel in outdoor education. I have witnessed this othering at camp and in conversations about outdoor education with peers. In order for summer camps to be spaces where youth learn to connect with each other and the land, we must first understand the representations of outdoor space at summer camp and challenge these representations to create inclusion and connection no matter how a participant identifies. While much of the research and focus in outdoor experiential education has been focused on maximizing the benefits of nature exposure and outdoor experiences for children, there has been a lack of research into how populations who have been historically overlooked or excluded from the outdoors could share in the benefits of outdoor education (Allison, 1996). Gender, race, ethnicity, ability and other social identities limit who benefits from outdoor education (Warren et al., 2014). If outdoor education is to be, as Priest (1986) claims it is, “a matter of relationships involving people and natural resources” (pg. 13), it ought to be a matter of relationships involving all people and natural resources. This means that summer camps need to take into consideration how participants identity affects the way they interact with natural spaces and adventure programming.

### **Gender and Sexuality**

The roles of gender and sexuality at summer camp are too large for me to cover fully in this thesis, but they are also too important to leave out. The importance of how camp represents gender and sexuality cannot be overstated. The recent #metoo and #timesup movements have brought gendered violence into the forefront of mainstream media. The current representations of



nature at summer camp are part of a culture of sexual violence. This narrative needs to change if camp is going to be a space that supports movements of social justice.

Nature and wilderness are commonly personified as feminine. She is either represented as a bountiful and gift giving Mother Nature, or a wild and seductive siren (Gregory, 2001). While it is represented as feminine, wilderness has a history of being regarded as a space to “produce that manliness, simplicity, and self-dependence most in unison with our political institutions” (Irving, as quoted by Nash, 1973, pg. 73). Cronon (1996) references how “[t]he mythic frontier individualist was almost always masculine in gender: here, in the wilderness, a man could be a real man, the rugged individual he was meant to be before civilization sapped his energy and threatened his masculinity” (pg. 14). The simultaneous reference to wilderness as a feminine space (Mother Nature) and a place to produce manliness creates an undertone of misogyny in the way we reference wilderness. Ralph Waldo Emerson echoed this undertone by warning that the solitude of wilderness, “is a sublime mistress, but an intolerable wife” (Nash, 1973, 126). This archaic view of wilderness fails to create space for female interactions with nature, and suggests that both wilderness space and women are valuable only for the recreation they offer to men. Today, it is still not uncommon to hear outdoor enthusiasts talk about “conquering a mountain”, an unfortunate perpetuation of the “rape-script” of men overpowering the female wilderness (Gregory, 2001, p. 89). Summer camps should be spaces to promote respectful conversations around sex, gender, and sexuality. These representations of wilderness undermine that respect.

Wall (2009) writes about how early summer camps were part of these sexist views on wilderness. The first summer camps were spaces designed to make soft modern boys into rugged frontier men. All male summer camps were a reaction to the perceived increasing feminization of childhood and were created as an escape from the mother’s influence. Without women, boys’

camps were a space to “explore and penetrate” a “virgin wilderness” and learn through adventure to be assertive and confident in pursuing the object of one’s desire (p. 179). Women and girls, on the other hand, were associated with civilization, and when they were eventually allowed at early summer camps, concern grew about the impact that the wild might have on the civility of the girls attending camp. This is a continuation of the view on feminine civility that Perry (2001) describes of the 1850s and 1860s when women were sent west to civilize the wild “backwoods” spaces and people in British Columbia. Early camps for girls were spaces that stressed physical appearance and clothing standards (Wall, 2009). As camps were designed specifically for girls and/or became co-ed, they continued to shape gender norms of youth, but became spaces to promote heteronormativity through supervised socialization.

I have witnessed a perpetuation of heteronormativity at summer camp as well as a positive shift in gender politics. The summer camp that I attended and work at is co-ed and continues in many of the heteronormative traditions that Wall (2009) describes, but it is also taking steps towards breaking the gender binary and creating gender inclusion. The younger groups at my camp are divided into cabins with boys or girls. The only campers who are not divided by gender are day campers (who do not stay overnight at camp and therefore need not specify which gender cabin they prefer), and the high school aged Leadership Development (LD) campers. The LD groups do all of their activities in a co-ed group but spend their nights in gendered cabins. This gender separation in younger groups and convergence in adolescence contributes to the development of gender norms and heteronormativity that Wall (2009) argues started happening at summer camps after World War II.

The feminization of nature and the masculinity of the romantic frontier individual creates an imbalance of power and a “rape-script” when talking about the conquest of nature through

outdoor recreation. The problem is not the solely due to the feminization of nature, because this feminization does not make people feeling unwelcome in nature. The problem lies in the way we romanticize a masculine figure conquering natural spaces. We should be teaching youth to have relationships with the land and with their partners that are based on respect rather than “conquest”. Summer camps can be part of this education by encouraging conversations about respect and consent, with other people and the environment. At my camp there is a rule against exclusive relationships. This is meant to reduce conflict and stop adolescents from experimenting with sex at camp. While these intentions are great, the rule can be misconstrued to make staff and campers think that camp is not a place to talk about sex or relationships. I think the opposite is true. We should be having more of these conversations, not to normalize heterosexuality as was done historically at camp (Wall, 2009), but because youth can benefit from conversations with young leaders about respectful and consensual relationships. It is our job to teach participants about healthy loving relationships and this starts with a rejection of relationships with the land based on conquest and victory.

Recently, there has been a surge of debate at camp about gender. With increasing awareness of the diverse ways that people can identify and express their gender, sex, and sexuality which defy the binary (Killerman, 2015), there is pressure from some staff and campers to find ways to make camp an inclusive space for people who do not identify with a binary gender or are transgender. Gendered washroom and cabins at camp force campers to identify with a binary representation of gender. This forces staff and participants who have a gender identity or expression that differs from their biological sex, and people who do not identify with a binary, to choose a cabin and washroom that does not represent their gender. In 2014 a new washroom facility was built at my camp with this in mind, and has individual stalls rather than

gendered rooms. Creating gender inclusion in this washroom facility was an easy adjustment to make in a new building, but is much more difficult and expensive to retrofit in the existing dining hall. The same difficulty can be extrapolated to the binary structure of cabin groups. New programs and buildings can be organized to create inclusion, but to change the existing structure is a much more onerous task. Gender is not the only social identity for which it is difficult to change the existing structure at summer camps.

### **Race**

After my first summer working at camp I read Warren's (2012) paper arguing that current outdoor adventure programs are the wrong fit for certain cultural groups, and we should not be encouraging people of colour to engage with these spaces if they do not want to participate. I have always noticed that my camp lacked racial diversity, but I had attributed it to a lack of racial diversity in the population of Victoria. I had never considered that the whiteness of summer camp might be due to the paradigms that Warren (2012) presents. Reading this paper as one of my first exposures to writing that truly criticized outdoor education. It left me in a spot of increasing tension that I still feel today. I agree with Warren's points about the fact that we can't force diversity, but I also love summer camp and am willing to make changes so that this space and the programming that it facilitates are welcoming to everyone, including people of colour.

Wilderness is an unwelcoming representation of space for people of colour for many reasons. To start with, the current domination of adventure sports and outdoor recreation by white males makes it difficult for participants of colour to find role models in the industry. For many participants, the outdoors is viewed as a space that is for white people (Rose & Paisley, 2012). This perception is fed by media representations of rugged individual white outdoorsmen,

such as “a canyon hiker who cuts off his arm to survive, the solitary climber who stands atop Mt. Everest, or a college dropout who ventures into the wild to live off the land in backcountry Alaska” (Warren, 2012, p. 122). These rugged adventure icons are all images that I have romanticized, but I can see myself in their shoes. It is rare to see media representations of people of colour in the wilderness.

The fact that these icons are represented as privileged individuals is another component of the romantic image of wilderness that is unwelcoming to other racial groups. For people of colour, a history of oppression has encouraged the formation of strong homogenous communities to have power within white culture, and this does not fit well with the romantic image of a privileged individual leaving their community, giving up the comforts of home, and venturing out into the wild, which is an image that is built into the culture of adventure (Warren, 2012). This adventure troupe entrenches the idea that positive interactions with nature require a detachment from social ties. The rugged adventure individual is often portrayed as heroic for abandoning a life of wealth or privilege within a broken materialistic society. He (or infrequently but on occasion she) abandons his life of privilege to go back to nature and be alone in the wild. Summer camps are all about creating social and environmental ties in parallel. Because of that intention of connecting the social and environmental learning that happens at camp, I think that romanticizing this idyllic form of privileged individualism has no place at summer camp and risks creating spaces that alienate youth from society rather than inspiring them to take positive social and environmental action.

This representation is a more difficult cultural construction to dismantle, but summer camps can be part of a holistic and communal vision of human-nature relationships. The easiest way to shift this representation is through careful attention to the way that summer camps frame

their programming. Programs can oppose systems of oppression by promoting community building rather than reinforcing selected individualized privileges. One program that camp has used, and I have endorsed, but which can perpetuate a romantic idealization of individualism in the wilderness is the “solo”. During a solo, participants spread out to spend extended time in self-reflection, alone with their own thoughts. For participants from cultures with a collective memory of violent acts in wilderness, a solo is not a place of positive self-reflection (Warren, 2012; Johnson, Bowker, Bergstrom, & Cordell, 2004; Callicott & Nelson, 1998). For white participants of privilege, I have seen the solo become a chance to act the part of the rugged “adventure man”. When I was a camper, a peer stripped near naked and ran around the forest for 24 hours, whittling sticks into spears, and climbing trees. It was not a period of self-reflection so much as a chance to portray Tarzan. Instead of long solos, I would suggest that summer camps and similar outdoor education programs should be encouraging shorter, more frequent periods of critical reflection and should be debriefing these experiences in a group setting. Debriefing self-reflection in a group creates vulnerability between participants, undermining the image of a rugged individual of privilege and replacing it with the ideal of a community in which people feel comfortable communicating feelings amongst each other.

Coleman (1996) and Chavez (2008) call on the field of outdoor education to diversify because diversity of participants creates more empathy between participants from different social groups. Both authors highlight the way that outdoor recreation and education spaces are dominated by a white majority. Their discussions are centered on cause of this “whitewash” in outdoor education and the ways that this structure can be changed to create diversity. I agree with these important discussions but I also think that Warren (2012) and Rose and Paisley (2012) make important distinctions about forcing people of colour to join programs if they are not

interested. Rose & Paisley (2012) acknowledge that outdoor education programs often bring “racially diverse participants into entrenched and crucially static structures [that are] unwilling to change” (pg. 144). This process is justified for the use of new terrain to change participants’ perspective. In a new setting participants can be themselves, free from the stigmas attached to their background. But placing diverse participants into unknown terrain often ignores the social differences that are brought to the experience by participants from different social identities. This structure risks a loss of learning transfer when participants return to their home environments and is a reiteration of white privilege in experiential education (Rose & Paisley, 2012) and does little to change the alienating contexts that participants experienced.

Most outdoor education programs acknowledge the need for diversity and social justice in their practice, but few have “moved beyond a basic recognition of the need to be culturally inclusive” (Roberts & Rodriguez, 1999, pg. 2). A socially just outdoor education program needs to move beyond inviting social “others” to a space created for the dominant social group. Other groups’ opinions must be included in discussion and they need to be involved in decision making (Chavez, 2008)—from setting the values out of which programs emerge to the ways that programs are structured and delivered. This will help break the cycle of privilege within outdoor education and create a welcoming space for racialized groups.

### **What We Can Do**

At summer camp, I see many ways to approach the power imbalance within outdoor education between groups of differing social identities. The first step is relationship building. Summer camps need to build a positive working relationship with local Indigenous peoples and racialized groups. At Thunderbird, that means that we need to start with invitations to the site so that these groups can see the actions that we are currently taking to engage youth with the natural

environment. Our open house every year has the potential to let families who are not ready to send their children to camp for a week experience a day of activities for free. With local Indigenous groups this relationship building is particularly important. Once a positive relationship exists, it is Camp's responsibility to work with Indigenous peoples to create programs that reflect the way that they would like to see youth interact with their territory. This engagement with Indigenous groups extends to the possibility of engaging local First Nations about our outtrip programs, which operate in the traditional and unceded territories of many First Nations.

The recent social media buzz around sexual harassment and assault has got me thinking about the opportunities created by the culturally imbalanced sphere of outdoor education. Sexual harassment conversations are currently dominated by female victims, which raises awareness but does very little to address the problem. Shifting the narrative from the victims onto men and what they can do to oppose harassment flips the problem back to its source. Men need to educate other men to oppose sexual harassment and assault. Summer camp is one space to do this type of education, but it is also a space to educate about other injustices and imbalances of power. If outdoor education spaces are currently dominated by a privileged white majority, these are opportune spaces to teach privileged kids about racism and environmental racism, and what people with privilege can do to oppose racism through social and environmental justice.

Educating the privileged is not a substitute for diversity at summer camps, but an opportunity created by the homogeneity. Graveline (1998) makes the important distinction that "while homogeneity may encourage self-disclosure, heterogeneity in the group allows the experience of difference necessary to challenge hegemony" (p. 90). When it comes to conversations around race and colonization when referencing spaces that we occupy and travel



through, it is camp staff's job not just to ask Indigenous or racialized groups to share their history and the history of the spaces with participants. It is our job to ask what histories we should be sharing and what stories are our place to share. The same applies to gender and sexuality. This type of education is one thing that summer camps can do to shift the narrative within wilderness education to make the wilderness a welcoming space for people from diverse backgrounds. An even more powerful act that summer camps can be a part of is the unsettling of the notion of wilderness. This does more than making wilderness more welcoming. It replaces the separations of wilderness with connections between people, each other, and nature.

### **Camp and Connection**

In some spaces of British Columbia and Canada, such as Qat'muk, where change to the land is still being proposed, it is easy to see the way that Indigenous connections to the land are erased by cultural ideas of wilderness and Canadian structures of law. In spaces where there is a hundred years of settler history it is much more difficult to see the structures of dispossession. These structures are the foundation upon which settler cultural forms are built, rendering them invisible as dominant notions of space, place, and being are normalized. For me, camp is one of the hardest spaces to accept as part of the systems that are disconnecting people from the land. Camp is the place that I feel the closest to Elsey's (2013) idea of *enfoldment*. I feel like I am a part of that land and it is a part of me. I grew up there. I grew up out of there. And I want to share that with other people, no matter who they are or where they come from. I want others to be able to feel like they are a part of nature the way that I have found connection at camp.

There is (settler) research to support my own feeling that that summer camps and outdoor education can help youth connect with nature. In his 1980 study of 45 leading conservationists, Tanner found a positive common relationship between childhood experiences in nature and adult

environmental behaviour. Another study by Christensen and Yoesting (1978) suggests similarly that childhood experiences influence adults' enjoyment of outdoor recreation. As outdoor recreation was an important factor in the emergence of the American environmental movement of the 60s and 70s, and continues to be an important factor today, these early experiences in nature are pivotal to creating adults who recreate in and advocate for natural spaces (Hanna, 1995; Dunlap & Heffernan, 1975; Nash, 1973; Bowen, Neill, & Crisp, 2016). Cancilla (1983) found that youth in a residential camp setting learned more environmental info per unit of time spent on a subject (Hanna, 1995).

One of the foundations of outdoor education at summer camps is the use of space out-of-doors, and this alone has been shown to benefit students (Ulset, Vitaro, Brendgen, Bekhus, & Borge, 2017; Louv, 2005; Priest, 1975; Lewis, 1969). Participants in outdoor education programs benefit from a healthy exposure to natural space, including the development of life skills (Moote & Woodarski, 1997), increased attention skills (Ulset et al., 2017), increased environmental connection (Tanner, 1980) and increased knowledge transfer (Quibell, Charlton, & Law, 2017; Cancilla, 1983; Priest & Gass, 2005). Recent studies such as the study by Ulset et al. (2017) indicate that “outdoor time in preschool may support children's development of attention skills and protect against inattention-hyperactivity symptoms” (pg. 69). Louv (2005) and others have identified that time outside is a crucial part of a healthy childhood and spaces like summer camps are important avenues for building that connection.

Knowing more about the history of British Columbia and the way it was built on unceded First Nations land has made me question my own relationship with the land as a descendant of settlers and immigrants. It has also made me question the way that camp represents its ownership of the land. The main parts of camp are private land within the Douglas Treaties that was

donated to the YMCA-YWCA in the 1930s from the Glinz brothers, who had used the area as a base for their logging operation. The rest of the property is leased crown land. The Douglas Treaties are still one of the only treaties signed on Vancouver Island and one of the only in British Columbia. While there is continued debate about the legal standing of the proceedings of the treaties, they form the basis for the legitimacy of private land ownership in the areas around Victoria (Petrescu, 2017). It has been unsettling to realize that my summer camp not only exists because of the systematic dispossession of land from Indigenous people, but that it is also perpetuating the colonial attachment in North America to the spirit of being a pioneer and explorer.

These realizations left me confused about my own connection to nature. How could the connection that I felt to the land be part of the systemic dispossession of land from Indigenous people? How could the culturally presentations that made the wilderness so welcoming to me also make the wilderness so unwelcoming to others? These questions left me searching for ways to change the messaging of a summer camp experience and decolonize the benefits of spending time in nature. Residential summer camps should be able to create experiences that connect youth with nature, while recognizing and respecting the history of the spaces they occupy including the cost to Indigenous peoples of preserving those spaces for outdoor recreation. We are already taking baby steps in the right direction, but have leaps and bounds to go in the journey of taking summer camps into the postmodern world.

### **Alternative Narratives of Wilderness**

There are many ways to shift the narrative of natural space as a wilderness to increase connection to nature and unsettle colonial landscapes. Alternative narratives of nature are available and some are already being used in outdoor education. We can look for wildness in our

everyday interactions with nature rather than finding remote and pristine environments for recreation (Cronon, 1996), we can connect meaningfully to nature through landfullness (Baker, 2005), we can embrace the complexity of nature-human relationships (Castree & MacMillan, 2001), we can rethink our parks (Rowell, J. personal communication, Dec. 12, 2017), and we can acknowledge the territories that we are occupying (Cullis-Suzuki). All of this disrupts the colonial narrative of wilderness and creates deeper more meaningful connection between people and land. Summer camps need to stop romanticizing trips to remote “virgin” wildernesses and promote connection to nature close to home.

Rather than focusing on romantic notions of remote untouched tracks of land, Cronon (1996) calls on the reader to look for wildness in their everyday. This helps to reframe the mind to consider humans as a part of nature and nature as a place with human connection. Cronon (1996) reminds us that “idealizing a distant wilderness too often means not idealizing the environment in which we actually live, the landscape that for better or worse we call home. Most of our most serious environmental problems start right here, at home, and if we are to solve those problems, we need an environmental ethic that will tell us as much about using nature as about not using it” (p. 16). He also argues that wilderness’ value lies in bringing awareness to the nature of our everyday environment. At summer camps, reframing wilderness means talking about nature’s connection to our everyday lives and framing the connection with nature that is created by summer camp experiences as something accessible in campers’ everyday life rather than something that requires an escape from society.

Molly Baker (2005) relates the separation created by ideas of wilderness to the separation created by adventure programming and offers an alternative. She argues that “it may be assumed that the environment plays an integral role in adventure-based programming simply because it is

there. Oftentimes, however, the land becomes a backdrop surrounding the adventure experience” (Baker, 2005, p. 269). In response to Aldo Leopold’s (1949) argument that society has become “landless”, Baker calls for the adoption of “landfullness” in adventure education. By challenging participants to be deeply aware, interpret land history, develop a sense of place in the present, and connect to home, the landfull framework unsettles the notion of wilderness and replaces it with a connection where humans are a part of nature. Landfullness also opens an awareness to diverse cultural interpretations of a space. If settlers can create meaningful connection with space, it is easier for them to empathize with Indigenous ontologies of land such the connection that Elsey (2013) calls *enfoldment*.

As mentioned above, the dichotomy of nature and culture through natural realism and social constructionism, but there are other ways of talking about human relationships with nature. Castree and MacMillan (2001) offer the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as an alternative to the “society-nature dichotomy [which is] a posthoc attempt by analysts to oversimplify complexity” (p. 212). At summer camp, I have seen the principles of ANT taught to children through a complex game of tag called the Animal Game. In the Animal Game, participants act in the role of animals, searching for food. There are herbivores and carnivores, and various levels to represent the size of animals that can eat each other. There is also a road with a Mack truck that can kill the animals, disease, elements, and humans. The Animal Game allows participants live as an animal for a brief time and experience the intricate relationships that exist between animals, other actors, and their environment. ANT similarly attempts to explain the complicated relationships between cultural and natural actors as a network. Programs like the Animal Game broaden the understanding of how people relate to each other and natural systems, which Orr (1992) says is the foundation of ecological literacy. “Knowing, caring, and practical competence

constitute the basis of ecological literacy” (Orr, 1992, p. 92). If summer camps can add to youth’s knowledge and care for environmental issues they will have done a small part in addressing the separation of nature and culture.

Another way to address the separation of nature and culture is to address the preservation of “untouched wilderness” in the name of recreation as parks. These spaces serve an integral function in the continued enjoyment of outdoor recreation activities such as hiking and canoeing that participants are introduced to at summer camp. Parks have become a part of Canada's cultural legacy and a space for people to connect with nature, but too often parks ignore or erase the existing cultural connection of Indigenous peoples (Mason, 2008; Youdelis, 2016; McAvoy, McDonald, & Carlson, 2003). Parks like the Stein Valley Nlaka’pamux Heritage Park and the Torngats National Park serve as examples of spaces created with Indigenous involvement to preserve cultural heritage rather than perpetuate a false notion of wilderness (Else, 2013; Rowell, J. personal communication, Dec. 12, 2017). Summer camps may not have the power to change the parks system, but they can change the way that parks are presented to youth, and ensure that they are not simplified to be viewed solely as spaces for recreation.

One of the most powerful ways that camps and outdoor educators can actively change the narrative of wilderness is to acknowledge the territory we are occupying. This is a step that can be taken on crown land, parks, private property, and the waterways that we paddle. It was not until I moved to the traditional territory of the TK'emlups te Secwepemc in Kamloops I became aware of the commonness and necessity of land acknowledgements. Growing up in Victoria, where the Douglas Treaties serve to perpetuate a false narrative of property ownership, I rarely experienced land acknowledgements. My move to Kamloops also coincided with the Idle No More movement of 2012, which motivated a lot of awareness to Indigenous land rights and title

in Canada (CBC News, 2013). Since then I have noticed an increase in land acknowledgements across British Columbia. Acknowledging territory is powerful and Cullis-Suzuki claims:

Acknowledgements of territory are now required practice at public events; even the City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is on the unceded lands of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. That is a radical shift that is significant not only symbolically, but for our very identity as Vancouverites and as Canadian peoples – a shift from the false narrative that Canada was built on empty land, a narrative that erases indigenous people. Today’s increasingly common use of the word unceded, a legal term, is powerful in unsettling the ingrained concept of land ownership in a capitalist and Western culture, and creating a more honest understanding of history, and the ongoing occupation in which we are complicit.” (2017)

As a guide and outdoor educator I see this as a vital way to start a conversation with participants about human connections to the land and the cultural significance of the space we are occupying. In remote natural settings it is easy to see the land as empty. Acknowledging unceded territory challenges this colonial narrative of wilderness and gives voice to the Indigenous way of knowing the land. This has the effect of shifting the western framework of knowledge and opens the narrative to reconciliation.

All of these alternatives to the current narrative of wilderness help to unsettle the separations of wilderness and replace it with connection. Searching for everyday wildness rather than finding connection in remote and pristine environments makes connection with nature accessible. Landfullness increases the impact of these connections. Embracing the complexity of nature-human relationships moves past the dichotomy that separates nature and culture. By rethinking our parks as cultural spaces as much as natural spaces, they become spaces that

promote connection. Acknowledging the territories that we are occupying undermines the entrenched notions of land ownership and wilderness that erase Indigenous peoples and cultures. These solutions seem simple when reading about them and imagining the change having an immediate impact. Unfortunately such changes are not that simple. The connection of person and place at camp has and always will be complex because of the settler colonial context of outdoor education in North America.

### **Conclusion**

I see this as a turning point for camps. They have the choice to be ahead of the curve of social change and lead youth into a wave of connection through social and environmental justice, or to be left behind in the wake with the separations built by the project of modernism. There are many ways that the current state of summer camps reflect a dated and colonial history, and other ways that they are poised to be forces of social change. Summer camps are places to create connection with nature as they open up conversations about taken for granted notions about what nature is, how we got to be in it, and what it is about it that we cherish. The evidence in the literature about outdoor education supports the idea that there are inherent benefits to an education model where the learning happens through experience in an outdoor setting (Louv, 2005; Chawla, 2015; Quibell et al., 2017; San Jose & Nelson, 2017; Ulset et al., 2017). Participants at summer camps benefit from a healthy exposure to natural space, including the development of life skills (Moote & Woodarski, 1997), increased attention skills (Ulset et al., 2017), increased environmental connection (Tanner, 1980) and increased knowledge transfer (Quibell et al., 2017; Cancilla, 1983; Priest & Gass, 2005). Summer camps focus on developing the interpersonal and intrapersonal life skills of the participants and develop their connection to and knowledge of the environment through exposure to nature. By integrating more and broader



environmental education into their programming, summer camps can create a greater connection between social relationships and the environment, which is integral to understanding environmental racism and environmental justice (Gruenwald, 2003). The benefits of outdoor experiential education will continue to play a vital role in the growth and development of participants. Increasing the diversity of participation at summer camps will not only expand the population that sees these benefits but shift the terms of these benefits for existing privileged demographic groups that dominantly participate in them.

Before outdoor education can have diversity and contribute to social and environmental justice it needs to address the ways that its current structure upholds systems of oppression. Once the structure of outdoor education is changed, “the future will require an even stronger commitment and greater willingness to deal with issues of power and social injustice on the part of experiential educators and outdoor experiential education programs” (Warren et al., 2014, pg. 98). First, summer camps need to reject the antiquated and colonial notion of wilderness as a pristine and untouched space. Framing land as this type of “virgin” wilderness does more than ignore and erase Indigenous ways of knowing land. It also perpetuates a sexist “rape-script” on the land, in which the masculine image of an adventurer “conquers” a feminine landscape (Gregory, 2001). Next, to create a welcoming space, summer camps needs to break down the exclusivity of outdoor recreation. Current outdoor recreation spaces are dominated by a wealthy white majority. The culture of outdoor recreation has its own customs, clothing and language making it an exclusive space (Johnson, 2016). This makes it unwelcoming to many participants who feel that they do not fit the social norms necessary to recreate in the outdoors (Rose & Paisley, 2012). It is the job of outdoor educators at summer camps to critically analyze the values perpetuated by their programs and who is welcomed or distanced by these values.

As a heterotopia, summer camps have the potential to oppose the dominant colonial discourse and contribute to postmodern social and natural connection. However, until the structures of oppression within outdoor education are addressed, it will continue to benefit a select exclusive group of participants while alienating marginalized groups—making them spaces that actively reconstitute structures of privilege and power. I hope to see the day that summer camps are decolonized and become forces of reconciliation, social justice, and environmental justice. Until then, I will be doing everything in my power to keep challenging participants, open their minds to alternative ways of thinking, and ride the changing tide.

### **Limitations and Further Research**

This thesis is my personal story of creating more space for reconciliation, decolonization, social and environmental justice within wilderness education at summer camp. There are many areas upon which I cannot comment or where further research is needed. First, I am approaching this thesis from a place of privilege. I want to close this research with a recognition that my social identity has an impact on my worldview, the way I approached this research, and the conclusions I have drawn. I can only comment on my own experience and what other authors have written about the experience of attending summer camp. My choice to approach this topic through secondary research and auto-ethnographic self-reflection was a conscious choice, but has also created limitations on the application of my conclusions. The relationship between wilderness and summer camps needs further research that takes into account Indigenous perspectives and experiences from diverse participants at more than one summer camp. While I am reassured by conversations with other outdoor educators who grew up going to camp that my experience is not exclusive, there is lots of room to expand this research through interviews and surveys of camp participants.

## **Returning with a Different Vision**

The research and writing of this thesis has changed my relationship with camp. I used to take for granted my appreciation for summer camp, both as a space and a program. This thesis has opened my eyes to some of the problems with summer camps as a cultural project that perpetuates the norms of modernism in its attempts to combat those same values. I now see more clearly how the attempts of summer camps and outdoor education at anti-modernism (Wall, 2009) have been like a fish fighting against the current. Some make it upstream, but not without constant effort, and they do nothing to change the flow of the current itself. Rather than wasting my energy on the uphill battle against the cultural separation of people and environment, I plan to focus my energy on fostering connection in its many forms. I don't know if any of the changes I make to my programming will truly change the connection that participants feel in the short term, but in the long term I hope that by starting the conversation, I have started a ripple of contribution to the postmodernization of summer camps, and their use for the ongoing movements of reconciliation, decolonization, social justice, and environmental justice.

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“All that we are is story. From the moment we are born to the time we continue on our spirit journey, we are involved in the creation of the story of our time here. It is what we arrive with. It is all we leave behind. We are not the things we accumulate. We are not the things we deem important. We are story. All of us. What comes to matter then is the creation of the best possible story we can while we're here; you, me, us, together. When we can do that and we take the time to share those stories with each other, we get bigger inside, we see each other, we recognize our kinship – we change the world, one story at a time...” — Richard Wagamese

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