

Coyote Killing: Where Species and Identities Collide

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Abstract

Although predator killing is a global phenomenon, few studies interrogate the individual and societal drivers of choosing lethal versus non-lethal actions towards coyotes. Results here derive from 48 *in situ*, semi-structured interviews conducted during 2015–2017 with rural residential and agricultural landowners in the Foothills Parkland Region of Alberta, Canada. Interviews recorded landowner experiences with coyotes, and their perceptions, values, beliefs, animal husbandry practices, and actions towards coyotes. Invoking a critical geography perspective and grounded theory methods, we found the practice of coyote killing and anti-coyote sentiments to be deeply entangled with and mutually reconstituted by constructs of “masculinity,” “rurality,” and colonial settler identity. Coyote killing also appeared as a form of discursive power, arising from urban-rural tensions. Finally, geographies of local history, family, and community intersected with identity, gendered-labor, and power – placing coyotes in a vicious and ongoing cycle of oppression and violence.

Keywords

coexistence – colonization – coyotes – gender – killing – rurality – oppression

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There were quite a few coyotes around there. So, we hung them on the fence and then they didn't come around much.

Participant 27

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There is a long history of coyote killing in Alberta, rural and otherwise. Indisputably, Alberta is “cattle country,” and it is impossible to separate the implications of this cattle economy from its enduring legacy on species like coyotes. With 19th-century European colonization, coyote killing became a mainstay agricultural practice that remains normalized across many landscapes of North America (Emel, 1995; Flores, 2016). Inherently racist, colonialism oppressed and killed Indigenous people, erasing their relational worldviews that valued other species and ecosystems (Cajete, 2005; Kimmerer, 2015). In tandem, the eradication of culturally significant wildlife such as buffalo, who were supplanted with domestic livestock, was central to gaining control over land and Indigenous populations (Anderson, 2004; Hubbard, 2014).

Colonialist ideology continues to enmesh not just certain human populations but the entirety of North American wildlife (Burow, 2017; Woolford, 2014) through intertwined, self-perpetuating value systems including speciesism (Jones, 2021; Singer, 1990), neoliberal constructs of nature (Kopnina, 2016), and nature-human division (Lorimer, 2015). Speciesism remains particularly formative. Founded on Aristotle's *Scala Naturae* (Hodos, 2009), speciesism hierarchically relates animals relative to humans, the pinnacle. Based on human exceptionalism, this system starkly contrasts Indigenous relational values and has ongoing material consequences for all animals (Rollin, 2017; Singer, 1990; Sunstein & Nussbaum, 2004). Further, the embedded supremacist value systems are enshrined in laws governing wildlife (Donihee, 2000), perpetuating oppression and marginalization (Holmes et al., 2015; Kanji, 2017) through indiscriminate killing of species, particularly coyotes and other legally designated “pest” or “nuisance” animals (Calgary Institute for the Humanities, 2022).

Yet the practice of coyote killing often works against ranchers' profit interests; killing can increase livestock predation by some carnivores and be more

expensive than most non-lethal deterrents (e.g., bio-fences, donkeys, fladry, light-sound devices, guardian dogs, and range-riders, among others; McManus et al., 2015; Plotsky et al., 2022). So, why does this killing paradigm persist among many landowners?

Limited qualitative analyses address this carnivore conundrum (Pooley et al., 2017). Research in Norway explored how contemporary rural politics complicate carnivore conservation efforts (Krange & Skogen, 2011; Skogen & Krange, 2003). Similarly, Collard (2012) analyzed cougars as biopolitical actors on Vancouver Island. Others, such as Batavia et al. (2018), acknowledged the politicized nature of many human-predator relationships, and Ojalammii and Blomley (2015) highlighted that indirect rather than direct human experiences drive negative attitudes towards carnivores (wolves specifically). Still, critical animal geographers and conservation biologists recognize the need for more comprehensive research spanning ecology and the social sciences in order to untangle the drivers of human-wildlife conflict (Ogra & Urbanik, 2018; Pooley et al., 2017; Redpath et al., 2017).

Considering these research needs, Alexander and Draper (2019a, 2019b) undertook the Foothills Coyote Initiative (FCI) and employed mixed methods to explore how landowners' situated experiences affected coyotes. Forty-eight interviews were conducted between 2015–2017 in the Foothills Parklands Region (FPR; Figure 1). This geographic location was selected to represent a broad range of landowners, yielding an opportunity to capture discourse that might emerge because of disparate communities converging in a finite, rapidly changing landscape. Respondents were identified as rural-residential (< 20-acre properties, typically urban “transplants”) or as agricultural (> 20 acres, livestock producers). Purposive snowball sampling was used to procure the sample set, beginning with three key informants identified through longstanding relationships in the region, and two key informants who responded to local media coverage (Alexander & Draper, 2019a). Twenty-five rural-residential and 23 agricultural landowners were interviewed. Interviews lasted approximately 1.5 hours and included close- and open-ended questions that explored broad categories of human-coyote relationships: experiential, perceptual, sentimental, and situational.

The FCI interviews were used previously to understand both landowner constructs of and rules of engagement with coyotes (Alexander & Draper, 2019a) and worldviews as drivers of coyote killing (Alexander & Draper, 2019b). We explored the prior theory that human-carnivore coexistence is not simply about conflict over livestock and pet predation (Margulies & Karanth, 2018). Here, we draw from scholars working across critical animal, feminist, and rural geographies, to expand on how human-coyote coexistence derives from human identity and related politics.

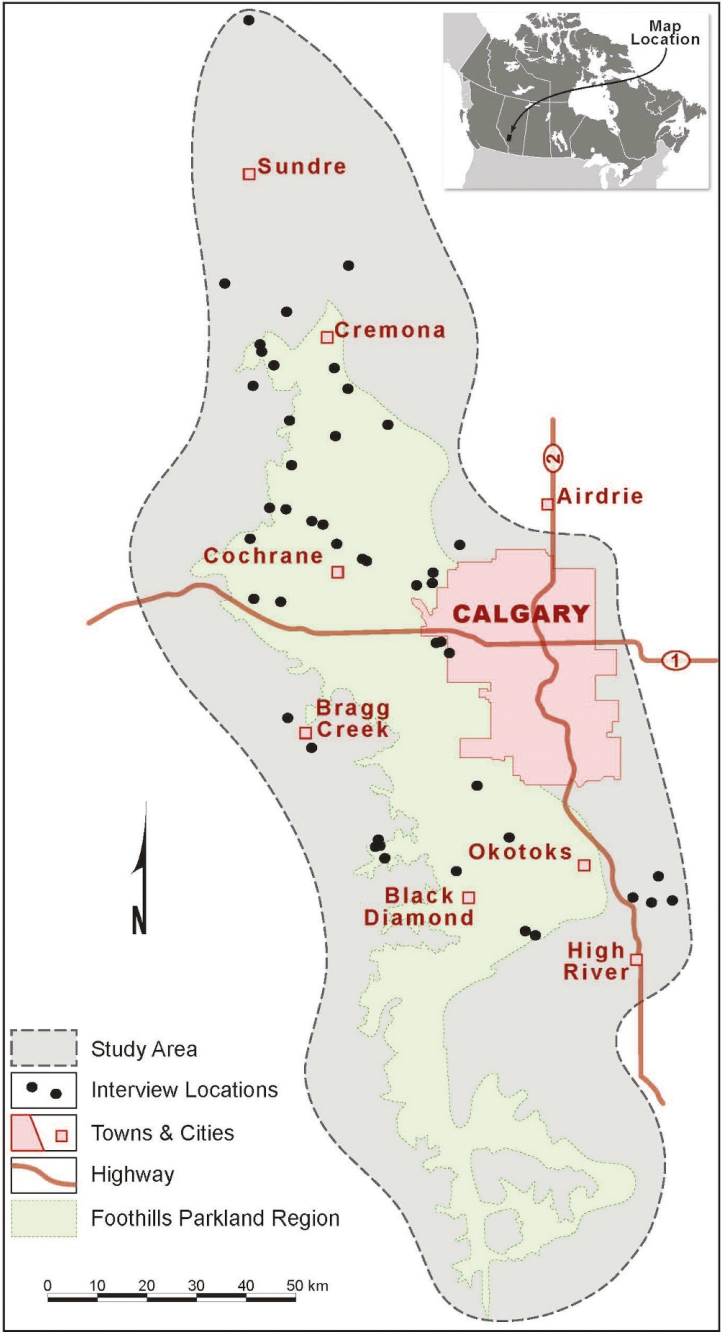


FIGURE 1 Map of Interview Survey Area, the Foothills Parkland Region, and Generalized Interview Sites

Our evaluation combined critical discourse analysis and grounded theory methods (Charmaz & Bryant, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Discourse may be understood as that which emerges conceptually beyond written or spoken communication. A relevant example is the emergent discourse of “power” that underscores why urban and rural people criticize and blame each other for coyotes’ behaviors (Alexander & Draper, 2019b). Alternatively, a respondent’s description of when or where they kill coyotes exposes an internalized construct of what is “out of place” (Cresswell, 2009; Philo & Wolch, 1998). Critical discourse analysis aims to challenge dominant “ideological and political effects of discourse.” Regarding how our respondents characterize coyotes specifically, discourse may expose how “social identities, relationships, and systems of knowledge” are defined (Steady et al., 2016, p. 167). As feminist scholars have asserted, discourse is powerful, contributing to both “strategies of domination as well as those of resistance” (Diamond & Quinby, 1988, p. 185). The more-than-human entities of the world are embedded in and defined by discursive power (Steady et al., 2016); coyotes, for instance, are defined by a plurality of worldviews and rules that include ways people define “commonsense knowledge” about coyotes (Alexander & Draper, 2019b).

Grounded theory assumes that vital themes are emergent from narrative or text; it does not rely on *a priori* hypotheses, and it is used to understand societal trends (Charmaz & Bryant, 2007). Our themes were coalesced by listening repeatedly to the 48 *in situ* interviews (Alexander & Draper, 2019a), identifying patterns or inconsistencies (Charmaz & Bryant, 2007), and through joint reflective discussion of each interview, setting, and tone. As notions of place, worldviews and context were central to the construction of nature, wildlife, and coyotes in previous evaluations (Alexander & Draper, 2019a; 2019b), we begin with a review of context.

Context Matters

Contextualizing analysis (i.e., within the broad history, politics, and economics of the FPR) helps to understand how speciesism produces anti-coyote sentiments and harmful actions. As previously noted, “codes for harmful animal practices are heavily dependent on immediate context. ... Because animal practices emerge over time as part of highly variable cultural landscapes, place is ... implicated” (Elder et al., 1998, p. 184). In the FPR, anti-coyote sentiments and coyote killing may be viewed as products of colonial settler livestock and agricultural industries and the ideologies that informed them (Gillespie, 2018). Speciesism is one of those ideologies that normalizes discrimination against individuals belonging to nonhuman groups (Horta & Albersmeier, 2020).

Speciesism has longstanding roots in the FPR, beginning with the colonial objective of ridding the landscape of anything “wild” that interfered with settlement (Hubbard, 2014). During and after the genocide of First Nations in North America,¹ agricultural lands (including in the FPR) were cultivated primarily for cattle production (Ghitter & Smart, 2009). Industries that assess livestock and other species on their economic value inherently rely on speciesism to engage in the labor of killing (i.e., cattle must be deemed to be less important than humans). Within a colonial framework, the growth of such industry demands the removal of any other species that are perceived to interfere with it (Holmes et al., 2015; Logan, 2015). Sometimes, animals may simultaneously yield discursive power. As noted previously, through the replacement of buffalo with livestock (Simonson & Johnson, 2005), livestock were used strategically to formalize colonial land grabs and enclose capital.

Legal frameworks that enshrine such colonial values inform the negative material consequences for wildlife in North America. In Alberta, “problem wildlife” like coyotes are controlled through actions stipulated in legislative, regulatory, and policy documents. Alberta’s Wildlife Act (RSA 2000, c W-10, 2000) and Agricultural Pests Act (RSA 2000, c A-8, 2000) identify coyotes as “furbearers” and “nuisances” respectively. The Agricultural Pests Act allows coyote hunting province-wide on private land (with landowner permission) at any time of the year, with no licensing or reporting required. The Wildlife Act requires fur management licenses to trap coyotes for their pelts. Although coyote predation on livestock previously caused considerable loss, improvements in agricultural practices since the 1990s have reduced the impacts of coyote predation (Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development, 2021; Alberta Fish and Wildlife Offices, 2021). Nevertheless, several documents, including the *Coyote Predation Control Manual and Study Guide* (Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development, 2021; Alberta Fish and Wildlife Offices, 2021), identify both lethal and non-lethal methods of “coyote control,” reportedly favoring the former in practice. Coyotes are deemed by law only to have extrinsic economic value (e.g., exported pelts valued over \$2.8 million in 2020–2021); they are not afforded intrinsic value. When coyotes are perceived to be overpopulated, local governments or private interest groups sometimes promote coyote killing, paying bounties or awarding prizes for evidence of dead coyote bodies (Marriot, 2015; Proulx & Rodtka, 2015). The previously referenced legal entities reinforce speciesist ideologies and power structures (e.g., prescribing who or what species are worthy of protection from

1 In the FPR, affected First Nations included Treaty 7 peoples: the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksiká, Piikáni, and Káínai), the Tsúüt’íná, and the Stoney Nakoda (Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley). The city of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3.

harm in the eyes of the law, who decides that killing coyotes is morally right, and who can do the coyote killing).

The region's landscape and economy remained dominated by cattle production for much of the 19th and early 20th centuries (Ghitter & Smart, 2009). By 1900, Calgary (colloquially, "Cow Town") housed a tannery, a pork-packing plant, three beef-packing plants, and cold storage (Ghitter & Smart, 2009). The Calgary Stampede has been a celebration of that "cowboy culture" since 1912 (Epp, 2008). Inherently rural by design, the "Stampede" showcases gender-specific rural activities: "white" men who steer-wrestle, bull-ride, and bronc-bust, and women who barrel-race or herd sheep. Exceptions exist of course, and gender stereotypes are shifting with the emergence of several female bull-riders, but in general cowboy culture still tends to showcase "masculine" domination of the wild (Gillespie, 2018). Moreover, due to animal injuries in rodeo sports (Bell, 2019), the "Stampede" continues to reinforce the higher status of humans, livestock, and associated industries over wild animals. The latter is reminiscent of Emel (1995) who noted that the "cultivation of 'alibis for aggression'... has ideological roots in various mediums of material and cultural conditions" (p. 709).

Changes in dominant industries began with the 1913 discovery of oil and gas in Turner Valley (a town in the south of the FPR; see Figure 1; Epp, 2008; Ghitter & Smart, 2009). By the late 20th century, FPR lands became "the site of acreage subdivisions, bedroom communities, championship golf courses and factory farms" (Epp 2008, p. 168). Urbanites, wealthy from the oil industry, moved in increasing numbers to the rural areas west of Calgary (Epp, 2008; Ghitter & Smart, 2009), transforming large agricultural properties into small acreages (< 20 acres). While the productive value of Alberta's land shifted, coyote killing persisted, as evidenced by our current analysis of the FCI interviews. For instance, Participant 27 mentioned the ongoing practice of hanging coyote bodies on the fence (see introductory quote), and Participant 41, who recounted putting toxic gas into an active den of coyote pups, remarked, "We plugged the hole and killed the litter ... it didn't bother me to take out a litter because they multiply, right?"² Other participants (10, 18, 34) identified historical and ongoing competitive coyote culls, while Participant 23 described the use of "Waltzing Matildas" – door-to-door "killers-for-hire" who have gainful employment every year in the FPR. Participant 30 described a trapper who killed over 100 coyotes on one agricultural property in a span of 30 days.

When it comes to killing coyotes, it is clear that geographic context matters. In the FPR, coyote killing is historic, sanctioned by law, shored up by speciesism

² Use of gas cartridges is no longer legal in Alberta.

grounded in colonial, agricultural economies, and reinforces the erasure of Indigenous value systems. The oil and gas economy (principally urban-based business) brought both anti- and pro-coyote sentiments, creating a milieu of tensions and discourse emergent in our analysis, as discussed next. Below, we explore how our interviews yielded evidence that the above noted contextual geographies intersect with aspects of identity, such as rurality and masculinity, fueling anti-coyote sentiments and coyote killing.

Coyotes and Rural-Urban Tensions

You know people who come from town – it’s never part of the way they grew up. With us, you were always ... killing [is] what you did a lot of. Like, as a kid, you hunted squirrels – that’s how you made your spending money. And if you ... had a problem animal, you took care of it. ... It was just part of being in this country. (Participant 27)

Although rural-residential landowners in the area have been characterized as wealthy retirees of the oil and gas industry (Epp, 2008), the FCI rural-residential respondents displayed considerable variability. Some lived extravagantly while others moved to the country for tranquility and to be close to nature, living modestly. Similarly diverse, agricultural participants included members of multigenerational settler families, while others descended from wealthy elite (“gentleman ranchers”; Alexander & Draper, 2017). At this rural-urban intersection, rural politics emerged with frequency as a core aspect of coyote killing, likely a symptom of a decades-long land conversion and clash of values in the FPR. Others have similarly found predators to be entangled in social tensions where sociocultural change challenges the “rural way of life” (Skogen & Krange, 2003).

Many rural societies face “economic modernization, cultural diversification and increased social and spatial mobility [that] weaken the basis of traditional rural communities ... built around agriculture and resource extraction” (Skogen & Krange, 2003, p. 312). With such challenges to rural communities, researchers note a “closing of ranks” in rural societies, in which rural solidarity and boundaries are reconstructed: anti-predator (or anti-rural-residential) alliances are one way to do so (Krange & Skogen, 2011; Skogen & Krange, 2003). In Norway, an anti-carnivore politic was critical to effectively “draw boundaries” to preserve rural solidarity (Bye, 2009). Similarly, responses and discourse from landowners interviewed by Alexander and Draper (2019b) often framed coyotes as “insiders” and “outsiders” within the rural community,

confounding the species coyote with the politics of controlling land and rural solidarity. Haraway (1991) argued these “drawings of inside-outside boundaries in knowledge ... [are] power moves, not moves toward truth” (p. 576). The questions become, then, how are coyotes first constructed to be inside/outside and how are they embroiled in these rural political power dynamics within the FPR?

Rural geography scholarship can inform answers to the previous questions. Rurality or being “rural” is understood not as a singular, fixed quality but, rather, as exhibiting plural and varying traits across sociocultural contexts (Pratt, 1996; Woods, 2009, 2010). Woods (2009) defined rural as a “term that describes nonurban geographical areas and the social and economic activities, lifestyles, cultures, etc. associated with them. Rural areas traditionally have been linked with agricultural activities, but the precise definition and delimitation of “rural” is heavily debated” (p. 429). A primary objective is identifying how rurality “is produced, reproduced, and contested” (Woods 2009, p. 429). Here, we examine the production of rurality through human relationships to coyotes in the FPR.

To begin, one participant described coyote hunts as a nostalgic rural tradition, run by “responsible people,” only possible before rural-residential (“acreage”) subdivision:

This is a game back in the fifties. ... Coyotes were so thick ... and of course there wasn't too many acreages around then. ... It was shotguns only. ... They'd advertise 'there is a coyote hunt this Saturday or Sunday'.... And depending on how many people met – for instance, if there were upwards of 200 people with their shotguns and you'd take an area off, maybe six-mile square and string everybody out. Well out here, heck, you might be three hundred yards apart so then what you would do is you'd walk to the middle and you're chasing all the coyotes ahead of you. And when you are in that last half mile ... you see the other guys coming at you. Well, then you got shot guns. Well, here of course you might have 20 to 100 coyotes [laughing] boxed in there. All the coyotes are running over to one side, and you would hear a barrage of shots ... that's how they eliminated them. And it worked. But that wouldn't even be allowed now. ... I mean you had responsible people doing it. ... The problem is too now that most of these residential acreage areas don't allow shooting. Now coyotes love those areas, they really move into those areas. (Participant 18)

Some participants described how relationships with coyotes are used as a form of delineating communities, defining who was truly “rural.” For some ranchers

(e.g., Participant 18), coyote hunting was rurality enacted. A subset of landowners used more nuanced language to reinforce identity boundaries, describing urbanites as irresponsible with coyotes. Participant 11, referring to communication about coyote sightings said, “It’s those people that live on those acreages there. They’re not ... country people. ... [They] are the first ones to post on our rural site anxious gibberish.” Further, after noting that “Urban thinkers don’t have a clue. They don’t even understand their septic system!” Participant 25 admitted, “I’ve watched [coyotes] stalk these new city pets ... and I find it quite amusing. You know, it’s unfortunate, but city people have to learn the hard way because they won’t listen to words.” Similarly, Participant 23 stated that “There is a cultural difference between rural and urban. ... You get a lot of what we call ‘acreage people’... People come in and say ‘I’m rural. I’ve got an acreage ... and they think they’re part of it and they blend in. But those of us from the older families ... we don’t consider them a part of it” (Participant 23).

Asserting who understands how to live alongside coyotes – and, more importantly, who does not – appears to be a method of reinforcing rurality and anti-coyote sentiments and shoring up boundaries between communities regardless of shared interests. This emergent theme, relating anti-coyote sentiments and actions to rurality, echoes earlier work in Norway which found that “economic and cultural modernization, urban-rural tensions, and conflicts between hegemonic and subordinate forms of knowledge” (Skogen & Kränge 2003, p. 309) were at the core of human-wolf conflict.

We have presented only a selection of the many narratives that informed rurality in relation to coyote killing and note explicitly that not all agricultural people identify with rurality in this way. Why the difference exists remains a topic for ongoing investigation. What is key here is that rurality, as expressed by many respondents, was bound up with the act of coyote killing. Moreover, while killing coyotes strengthen bonds within certain agricultural communities, it also appeared central to the “production” of masculinity.

Coyotes and Masculinity

We found that coyote killing was connected to constructs of masculinity: specifically, gender-based labor (e.g., violence and killing) and masculine traits produced and contested through practices. None of our interview questions specifically targeted concepts of masculinity (nor the previous urban-rural tensions); the concepts and discourse emerged through narratives associated with both close- and open-ended questions. Questions that tended to produce gendered responses included “When you need to kill a coyote, who do you

trust to help you?” and “What about coyotes makes you angry?” We expected the first question would yield only one or two selections from the suggested options (self; friend; family member; government; other) but it often provoked a longer narrative (e.g., option “the government” could yield a long discussion about the failure of government to “do the right thing”).

Our analysis of masculinity follows from Little (2009), who asserted that an essential role of feminist and rural geographies is to examine how gendered roles are not just practical divisions of labor, but rather “how gendered power relations [are] woven through ... the status and responsibilities of men and women on the farm” (p. 316). The concept of masculinity is agreed to be socially constructed (Lippa, 2014); distinct from biological sex, it encompasses traits and acts that reinforce ideals of male strength, domination, control over nature, and being a protector (that may be normatively reinforced). For example, when one male participant was asked, “Who do you trust to help you with a coyote problem?” he replied: “If my son is with me, he can do it ... because I taught him how to shoot. Our daughter would be useless. She would want to pet it” (Participant 25). Similarly, in almost all cases when a female respondent was asked the same question, she described a male relation, despite being presented with a variety of options (e.g., self; government agent; neighbor; family member). Interestingly, all narratives that described coyotes being killed for entertainment were provided by men and identified men as the perpetrators of that violence.

Male participants were not solely responsible for the production of gendered divisions of labor. Rather, both male and female respondents reinscribed traditional gendered roles of place, consciously or unconsciously. For example, there were accounts of both male and female respondents describing a woman’s labor as being conducted inside the house, while a man’s labor was outside of the house. When asked “Do you ever use strychnine or compound 1080?” (a common wildlife poison), one female respondent answered: “Would we use it if we had to? Maybe. I don’t know. I wouldn’t. [My husband] takes care of everything that is outside” (Participant 1). Similarly, when Participant 28 was asked who she would trust with a coyote problem, she answered her husband, but clarified: “You know if there was a situation ... I would probably take the .22 to it if I had to. But ... my husband says he doesn’t want me using a gun (laughs).” Male participants, when answering this question, often asserted that they would be the one to handle a “problem coyote” – even if they confessed, like Participant 39, they were not a “good shot.”

The gender boundary assertions surrounding coyote killing were emphasized further by Participant 10. Referencing a private men’s club that

occasionally held coyote killing contests, he stated, “women were not wanted.” He added:

It’s the same problem in the RCMP and in the armed forces. When you mix the sexes, the culture changes totally. There is a lot of resentment and anger and, in fact, a number of the [name redacted] lodges have folded for that reason.

As noted above, scholars have demonstrated that rural masculinities are not fixed; rather, they are regularly contested in various sites such as bars, sporting events, hunting trips, and even dog fighting (Campbell et al., 2006; Kavesh, 2019; Krange & Skogen, 2011). It seems from our FCI interviews that coyote killing is yet another mechanism for reasserting masculine identity. Our interviews also suggested links between coyote killing, masculinity, and familial or community legacy. Passed down from generation to generation, killing coyotes and hunting more broadly were described as enduring performances central to rural masculinity. When FCI participants were asked “Could you describe your earliest memory of encountering a coyote?” several participants responded by describing a coyote encounter alongside their father or an older male. For instance, Participant 14 remembered pleading with her father to not kill a coyote they passed while driving down a rural road in Quebec, and Participants 18 and 34 remembered coyote hunts during the early 1950s where their fathers would bring shotguns and encircle coyotes. For Participants 27 and 44, their first memory of a coyote was their father shooting one. One participant, who became a government agent responsible for distributing toxins to kill coyotes, described his earliest memory of killing a coyote alongside his father:

I was probably from here to you from a coyote. My dad – we were actively hunting them – he was just walking through the bush, and I was like waiting on the riverbank by the main trail where they came out in winter. He came blasting out of there and I shot him! [How old were you?] I dunno. Like 12. [Was it frightening?] No, I was pumped! It was a pretty good rush cause you’re like, “holy crap!” (Participant 36)

As noted by Brandth (2016), while rural fathering has changed (raising children is more equitable now than in previous generations), certain gendered divisions and traditions have endured; this clearly is the case in some FPR families. Fathering practices through hunting, sports, and other outdoor activities “constitute stable sites of rural masculinity” (Brandth, 2016, p. 435). Without

meaningful contestation from within, gendered parenting legacies will likely be reproduced in following generations, reinforcing the notion that coyotes are killable, and that doing so strengthens the masculine identity.

Coyote killing was further invoked as a way men “defended” and “protected” property (and human community), livestock, and companion animals. For instance, Participant 7 described the potential threat of a coyote for his rancher friends saying: “I know a lot of my friends had a gun by the doors and when the coyotes started howling, they went to save their calves. ... I had nothing to defend, so I just stayed in bed.” Some interviews revealed a rhetorical framing of man-versus-nature, with significant and – at points – militarized implications. For instance, Participant 18 described with pride that his sniper-trained relative used coyotes for shooting practice between deployments. Participant 30 recalled recruiting an ex-marine sniper to shoot coyotes after a calf was killed. Explaining that the killing of a calf had made him angry, he recounted talking to the sniper as he shot coyotes: “He says, ‘You see that over there?’ ‘Yeah’ and the next thing you know you see it flying in the air. I’m just like, ‘Wow. That’s crazy.’” With apparent pride, he noted that they did not lose any calves for the rest of the season.

Connections between military identity and rural masculinities were also articulated. When these concepts intersected, they framed men as being physically fit and mentally tough, able to cope with the physical challenges of being outdoors while either ranching or being a soldier (Woods, 2009; Woodward, 2000). Rural “natures,” and perhaps coyotes by extension, then, are seen as a test of both rural and military masculinity (Woods, 2009; Woodward, 2000).

Coyote killing also appeared to be linked to developing traits that facilitated dominating nature as a way to produce masculinity. With the linkage to agricultural context and livestock/property themes, these data also support the idea that certain rural masculinities rely upon gendered-capitalist notions; men dominate nature to maximize production and therefore provide for their families (Little, 2002). Within such hegemonic norms, Little (2002) noted the consequences of failure to maintain masculine responsibilities has larger implications allowing nature to disrupt broader societal production and defense. It is impossible to ignore the finding that killing coyotes in the FPR is framed as necessary to protect calves and, thus, commodities. As such, coyotes are “enemies of rural livelihoods.” This is not a new concept: in 1930, E. A. Goldman (then-Senior Biologist of the U. S. Biological Survey) referred to coyotes as the “archpredator,” a “very serious menace,” and a “destroyer of useful creatures” (Goldman, 1930, p. 330). Echoes of this sentiment appeared as recently as 2010 in the fourth, revised reprint of a 1982 Alberta government document, *Coyote Predation of Livestock*, which labeled coyotes as

the “major predator of livestock in Alberta” (Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, 2010, p. 1).

The noted discourse that frames coyotes and other predators as enemies of commerce may have created ideal conditions for ongoing killing coyotes for “sport,” which may also reinforce within-group solidarity. Some participants in the FPR described killing of coyotes as recreation: “Killing coyotes was considered recreation. ... Around Tofield where we spent some time, some of those guys used to chase them with Ski-Doos. It was just a recreational thing. They’d run them down.” (Participant 48). Others described coyote killing as an ongoing sport. Participant 10, referencing an all-men’s club, stated:

One of their big things is to have this coyote cull, to go and shoot all these coyotes. See, the coyote cull that these guys do – this is a guys’ club and it’s competitive and there’s a bit of money involved and it’s a sport. ... They have a sort of fraternity.

Here, coyote killing may be a way in which masculinity is enacted and reinforced, echoing Franklin (1998), who argued that hunting, as well as angling, allows men to recapture a connection to their frontier selves, dominating nature. Franklin’s (1998) observations also contextualize other discourse, such as other FCI respondents who linked killing coyotes to male entertainment. Participant 34 stated he “wouldn’t be opposed” to a coyote killing contest and boasted about a coyote hide hanging on the wall of his office – presenting it, seemingly, as a trophy of sorts. Participant 24, a male, when asked to describe “how would it make you feel if you had to kill a coyote” said, “Exciting. It’d be a sad world without Mr. Fox and Mr. Coyote, but they are a great challenge. The smartest there is out there.” Emel (1995) argued this level of admiration for hunted predators is not unusual. Speaking uncannily to Participant 24’s response, she wrote: “It was permissible within the hunting or virility code to show admiration or sympathy for the foe – particularly if he (it was always a ‘he’) was a worthy opponent” (Emel, 1995; p. 723).

As argued, masculinity always has the potential to be challenged, contested, and redefined as it is produced (Bye, 2009; Campbell et al., 2006; Little, 2002; Woodward, 2000). Similarly, we observed that masculinity was not solely an aspirational trait of men; women also aligned with the masculine desire to undertake (or the history of having undertaken) the hard labor of killing. Moreover, the choices, words, and actions of several male interview subjects challenged the “coyote killing tradition” and did not view killing as a way to bond with other males or defend their masculinity. As Participant 47 said, referring to his patriarchal lineage, “It’s a shared philosophy in the family and

I think it rolls with generations ... the coyotes and the elk and cougars and stuff were here. We can live side by side."

This shifting relationship between nature and gender (Nightingale, 2006; Woodward, 2000) suggest that killing coyotes (or dominating nature in any way) need not be essential to masculinity. Notably, other performances of masculinity exist in the FPR. For example, Participant 29, a man who had grown up on a cattle ranch in the FPR, spoke of "elk whispering," describing herding elk out of a cattle-grazing pasture at a slow walk. Participant 42 described the joy in running his huskies on a dog sled and having coyotes run in parallel. It is through their words and actions that what it means to be a "rural man" is contested; relatedly, what it means to live as a coyote in the FPR can perhaps change too.

Conclusion

We found coyotes were defined and treated as a species entrained by colonial settler ideologies of speciesism, and as subjects of particular aspects of identity and politics (Hobson, 2007), "hung up" in rural-urban tensions and complex ideals of rural masculinities. Alberta's economy and society were built to protect the production of certain nonhuman animals and encourage the eradication of others. The prioritization of livestock and settler colonialists was anticipated to help the individual, the community, and the nation to thrive economically. Concomitantly, coyotes and other predators, as well as Indigenous peoples, were framed as pestilent bodies, threatening settler colonists' way of life (Anderson, 2004; Emel, 1995; Kim, 2015).

In recent decades, as agricultural and grazing lands have been subdivided and developed, some perceive the rural way of life or cowboy culture to be threatened. One way through which rural solidarity appears strengthened is through the act of killing coyotes. In this world, coyotes are a token for rural politics, used in various human power moves to delineate who is and who is not truly rural. Rural masculinity also appears to be reinforced through the act of coyote killing. Both male and female respondents affirmed that coyote killing is seen largely as gendered labor. Coyotes, framed as a threat to livestock production, are "the enemy" – not only to the rural livestock industry, but also to (wo)men whose income depends on bringing those livestock bodies to market and to the unity and prosperity of communities and society.

The disclosure of coyote sport killings and torture (see Alexander & Draper, 2019b) highlighted another way that masculinity might be reaffirmed through

the use of “domination over nature” to survive and expand. A logical extension of our findings for wildlife advocates and scholars is to examine efforts to acknowledge and grapple with the complex, situated ways that animal bodies and lives become part of the production of genders, communities, and societies. However, we caution strongly against falling into stereotyping genders in relation to killing; at least three of our respondents reported an older male or parent figure taught them the value of animal life when hunting, or killing, and those lessons from men led to anti-killing sentiments and actions, despite growing up in a coyote-killing culture (Alexander & Draper, 2019b).

Coyotes are integral to various human identities and these identities are reinforced by the legalized marginalization and suffering of coyotes (Calgary Institute for the Humanities, 2022). Some of these human identities are clearly a product of and continue to be reinforced by ongoing colonial ideologies (Belcourt, 2015). Healing human-coyote relations requires both an understanding of how people with anti-coyote sentiments justify killing and how killing links to identity, and an overhaul of legal systems that support killing politics. An effective path toward wildlife coexistence, and the topic of ongoing research, requires decolonizing the many facets that entrain our relationships with nonhuman animals (Belcourt, 2015; Collard et al., 2015).

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