DECOLONIZING EXPERIENCES: AN ECOPHENOMENOLOGICAL
INVESTIGATION OF THE LIVED-EXPERIENCE OF APPALACHIAN TRAIL
THRU-HIKERS

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the

thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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

ABSTRACT

While the ubiquity of experiential outdoor recreation remains an obvious postulate of scientific discourse, the adequation of such experiences remains a point of contention. Although there is a substantial amount of literature on outdoor experiences, many studies have unfortunately relegated the 'lived experience' to a seriatim of phenomena, comprised of individual disjunctive experiences. The allure of studying phenomena associated with these experiences has led to copious research on positive, extraordinary, or beneficial aspects embodied in the ideology of a wilderness experience. The pervasiveness of this ideology represents the colonization of a variety of outdoor recreation experiences and has, in many ways, marginalized quotidian, inimical, and socio-ecological experiences that, when combined with conventional conceptualizations, elucidate the vicissitudes of an outdoor recreation experience. This deficiency indicates a need to (a) improve our understanding of ideology infusing experience, (b) examine the nuances of the lived experience within an outdoor recreation context, and (c) revise some of our present conceptual, theoretical and methodological understandings from which planning, policy and management flow.

Rooted in a critical dialogue that endeavours to theorize experience in contrast to the colonial impetus, this dissertation explores the lived experience of Appalachian Trail thru-hikers. As a result of this disposition, the purpose of this dissertation is to expose the dynamics associated with colonized experiences and empirically research

the lived experience of thru-hikers from an ecophenomenological perspective. The subsequent approach views the activities of the lived human body as the process through which the world comes into being. Building on Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, ecophenomenology provides the foundation of the experiential self, and thus underlies the representation of the trail environment as a sensuous field of human activity where one is merged with one's socio-ecological surroundings.

Explication of empirical materials from 27 participant interviews resulted in a wide range of thru-hiking experiences representing the operative essence of Appalachian Trail thru-hiking. The operative essence was identified across 4 broad dimensions: Perseity, Sojourning, Kinship, and Wild Imbrication. Each dimension comprised a dialectic which emerged from interview excerpts both congruent with and in contrast to wilderness ideology. Further exploration of wilderness ideals resulted in thru-hikers negotiating tensions related to ideological wilderness meanings and their own actual thru-hiking experiences. This negotiation allowed a broader conception of wilderness to be illustrated as a continuum of meaningful experiences. In addition, ecoliteracy emerged as an experientially driven learning process whereby thru-hikers negotiate alternative meanings of wilderness with ideological meanings. The implications for experiential and wilderness related research along with management concerns are discussed.

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Lastly, and most important, I thank God for abiding with me particularly through these last few years. As with life, on and off the trail, He guides me every step of the way.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Coleman and Jessie Zealand, who love unconditionally; always have time to play; and in whose innocence and faith we can learn so much.

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This dissertation is a work that has its inspiration in learning from autism. Yes, in the pages that follow I discuss academic theories and assert paradigmatic positions and No, none of them mention autism; nonetheless the wellspring of this project is in what I have learned from autism. How so? Read on…

"So, what do you think?" my wife asked our physician.

"Well, your son has autism." she said matter-of-fact.

"What do you recommend we do?" I asked as an anxious father immediately driven to search for the solution to a problem.

"Well, there's not much anyone can do other than getting some occupational or physical therapy and long term support for him." the physician replied.

But there was something driving us to look further and broader for more answers. Shortly after this dead-end assessment we learned of twin autistic boys who were making remarkable progress in an innovative best-practices program called Intensive Multi-Treatment Intervention (IMTI) and were inspired to contact the founder and autism specialist, Jonathan Alderson.

"One important technique of this program is called Joining which means you literally join Coleman by doing what he is doing when he is exclusive." (i.e., shutting you out) Jonathan explained further, "You see, we can't begin teaching him if he isn't paying attention and lacks studentship, and he won't be motivated to be a student if you don't have a relationship with him. More importantly, in order to have that

relationship you need to get to know your son, get to know and understand **his**

world."

Initially there were times when I simply didn't understand what in the world I

was doing joining my son spinning in circles, chewing on a Matchbox car, or lining

up toys *ad infinitum*. After weeks of doing this I still doubted about how this was

going to change Coleman. It wasn't until I stopped "Joining" Coleman as a technique

to change him and started *Joining* to simply enjoy my son in the moment; as an act of

acceptance of his unusual and unique behaviors.

One day Coleman and I were both chewing on blocks when suddenly, he

removed the block from his mouth, looked at me and for the first time, we connected.

I had stopped attempting to make Coleman speak my language and instead I was

speaking his language by interacting with him through his motivation and in his

world in his way. I believe this showed him that I cared enough to attempt to

experience life in his way and he simply reciprocated.

This was the beginning of Coleman opening up to me so that we could both

learn. I now realize the more I learn Coleman's language the more he learns mine.

I'm in a continuous reciprocal conversation with my son; it's just not always in

English. While I still want my son to learn to communicate in English (and he is), it

is not because I want to change him but simply that it will allow him to communicate

with many others. This will no doubt make his life much less complicated.

As I began to learn Coleman's language I began to realize I had constrained myself from many other languages as well. It was then that I came to ponder,

What would the implications be for studying outdoor recreation experiences if I came to view lived experience as a type of conversation with the environment?

Moreover, what could we learn about experience if we could surpass "our strange inability to…hear as meaningful anything other than human speech" (Abram, 1996, p. 27).

In addition to David Abram's insightful work, I gravitated to Merleau-Ponty's work, in particular his idea of the reversibility of the flesh and hence, the gestural genesis of language. That is, to see is at one and the same time to feel oneself seen; to touch a tree is also to be touched by the tree; to leave a footprint on the ground is also to take some of the ground with you. Here the reversible essence of ecological experiences is realized as the embodied person is as much a part of the sensible landscape as that which they explore. Hence, to say I am experiencing the world is also to say I am being experienced by the world. For me this is reinforced with the Ecclesiastical passage, "we all came from dust, we all end up as dust," (Ecc. 3:20, The Message).

The continual reciprocal conversation with nature was this idea that flowed from my experiences with Coleman and reinforced in Merleau-Ponty's writings. As such, I am deeply indebted to my son for the wonderful insights into the ecology of my own life by understanding some more of his life. Autistic individuals can teach us

so much about our own limited perspectives of our enveloping world and how to more fully experience life. This research is one such outcome of attempting to experience and communicate life more wholly.

CHAPTER 1

JOURNEYING INTO THE DISCOURSE

...the whole of nature is the setting of our own life, and our interlocutor

in a sort of dialogue.

- Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962)

The culture of nature – the ways we think, teach, talk about, and construct the

natural world – is as important a terrain for struggle as the land itself.

- Alexander Wilson (1991, p. 87)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Trail use is an activity as natural and enduring as the earth on which it occurs. Indigenous populations all over the world used trails as simple routes for travel long before recreational purposes. Indeed, several of the roads on which we now drive our automobiles were most likely, at one time, rough trails cut through the landscape (Sidaway, 1979). Within developed countries trails may appear anachronistic in light of so many mechanized means of conveyance however; they remain as popular recreation amenities. Indeed, the popularity of recreational trails has been continually growing to the point that, today, trails within National and State Parks in the USA are one of the preeminent facilities for visitors and integral to the American landscape (National Park Service [NPS], 1990). In North America and perhaps the world, the Appalachian Trail (AT) has long been the hallmark of recreational trails including the distinction as the United States' first legislatively designated National Scenic Trail.

Winding its way along the spiny ridge of the Appalachian Mountains, the AT traverses 3500 km (2175 miles) from Springer Mountain, Georgia to Mount Katadhin, Maine (see Figure 1). Geographically located within a day's drive of 67% of America's population, there are approximately 4 million people (http://www.nps.gov/appa) who annually hike sections of the AT as a means to recreate in nature. Yet each year, beginning in February and March, merely two thousand individuals (referred to as thru-hikers) begin with the intent of sojourning the full length of this long distance trail in one season; not more than 25% cover the entire distance (www.appalachiantrail.org/2000milers). Those who hike the length of the AT cross through eight National Forests, six National Parks, and over 60 state parks, forests and wildlife areas. While these

Figure 1. **The Appalachian Trail.**

protected areas exist for both human use and environmental conservation, the trails

within these areas were designed solely for people. Such is the case for the AT; while

this *de facto* linear national park is administered directly as a unit of the National Park

Service but managed by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), its "sole purpose

as a recreational resource is to provide an opportunity for travel on foot through the

wild, scenic, wooded, pastoral, and culturally significant lands of the Appalachian

Mountains" (Appalachian Trail Conference [ATC], 1997a, chap. 2I, ¶ 2). Moreover,

the ATC specifically is concerned with the AT management zone, a legislatively-

protected corridor, not only to protect the footpath itself but to provide primary

protection of the AT experience. Mandated by the ATC, the trail experience

includes:

- opportunities for observation, contemplation, enjoyment, and exploration of the natural world;

- a sense of remoteness and detachment from civilization;

- opportunities to experience solitude; freedom; personal accomplishment; self-reliance; and self-discovery;

- a sense of being on the height of the land;

- opportunities to experience the cultural, historical, and pastoral elements of the surrounding countryside;

- a feeling of being part of the natural environment; and,

- opportunities for travel on foot, including opportunities for long-distance hiking. (ATC, 1997b, ¶ 2)

In these mandates are adjectival phrases, some explicit, some not, that correspond with the notion of a "wilderness experience." More specifically, experiential ideals such as remoteness, solitude, freedom and, self-reliance are seen as integral to both the AT experience and a general wilderness experience. As I will discuss more in Chapter 2 one of the main foci of this dissertation is to explore the Appalachian Trail's long and storied wilderness history, current status and how this influences the AT thru-hiker experience.

1.2 OUTDOOR RECREATION EXPERIENCES

To the extent that outdoor recreation inherently involves "an interaction between the participant and an element of nature" (Ibrahim & Cordes (2002, p. 5), few would argue that this interaction is, typically, not also 'an experience'.[1] Taking up a broad view of ecology (cf. Evernden, 1985; Kohak, 1997), this interaction is suggestive of the ecology of experiential recreation which has been the focus of an enormous amount of research and for good reason. Many researchers have sought to identify positive outcomes, types of experiences, and meanings associated with outdoor recreation's interaction with nature (cf. Borrie & Birzell, 2001), for various reasons but we may generally agree that this research seeks to inform academics, practitioners and users for the betterment of humans and conservation of nature through recreational means. However, in examining the literature recreation

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[1] I will return to this later but Turner's (1985, 1986) differentiation between 'an experience' and 'mere experience' and Gadamer's (2004) illustration of the importance of 'an experience' serve here as a reference to the popular conception of an outdoor recreation experience.

researchers have largely adopted an unquestioned reliance on the concept of 'experience' for study. Experiential conceptualizations in the empirical literature formulate a concept that is frequently articulated but seldom defined. Moreover, in our current Occidental culture (i.e., Pine & Gilmore's (1999) experience economy), the term 'experience' is tantamount to what Donoghue (1976, cited in Abrahams, 1986) calls a 'god term':

> There is always a temptation to assume that because a god term is holy to its celebrant[s] it must be holy to everyone; a writer may make the mistake of thinking that he does not need to establish the sanctity of the word, that he has only to invoke it. (p. 47)

Indeed, numerous scholars refer to an adventure experience, backcountry experience, nature experience, outdoor experience, primitive experience, trail experience, and wilderness experience but few discuss what these experiences are or what they mean. Hence, it seems ironic that in many experiential studies the outdoor recreation experience simply becomes a postulate of research without critically examining what it means to experience outdoor recreation. This is not an unreasonable notion given the posture of conventional, positivistic science. This posture, identified by Edmund Husserl (1948) as the *natural attitude* is our taken-for-granted, culturally conditioned view of the nature of reality. The natural attitude in conventional research has contributed to only one of at least two basic modes of experiential understanding (Csordas, 1990, 1994, 2002). The upshot is a fully predicative, reflected-on

understanding of outdoor recreation experiences that is both conceptually mediated and categorically structured (cf. Throop, 2005). As the dominant approach to thought on this subject, there is a great deal of outdoor recreation, natural resource, and environmental research (cf. Ewert, 1985; Dawson, Tanger-Foster, Friese, & Carpenter; 1998; Driver, Nash, & Hass, 1987; Hull, Michael, Walker, & Roggenbuck, 1996; Kaye, 1999). Furthermore, by relying on *a priori* reasoning, reductive analysis, and ambiguity, not only has the notion of a recreation experience been unspecified but specific experiential derivatives are myopically determined for the participant. As a result of the difficulty to reduce and aggregate discursive and dialectical experiences, many researchers have opted to examine the relationship between setting attributes and experiential outcomes (cf. Ewert and Hollenhorst, 1994; Graefe and Fedler, 1986; Peterson, 1974; Tarrant, Cordell, and Kibler, 1997). However, in addition to the aforementioned problems, this approach neglects various experiential nuances in favor of a collection of generalized attributes (Borrie & Birzell, 2001).

As a reply to this categorical essentialism, this study adopts a discursive view of experience as a process in which the co-construction of subjectivity is central (cf. de Lauretis, 1984; Scott, 1991). This perspective necessarily requires the investigation of both what is produced through experience and the process of its creation. To think about subjects who are constituted through experience is to also historicize, and therefore problematize, the taken-for-granted conception of an outdoor recreation experience, the AT experience.

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1.3 ECOPHENOMENOLOGY

Edmund Husserl understood that to really understand experience "one must work to reveal the taken-for-granted assumptions underpinning the scientist's natural attitude in order to affect a shift" (Laughlin & Throop, 2006, p. 309). Arguably, a major shift in the social sciences began when Husserl developed a phenomenological posture in which the scientist allows for a pre-predicative or pre-reflective mode of experience to be examined. To the extent that Husserl developed phenomenology out of a discontent with naturalism, he intended to replace the causality of positivistic science with the intentionality of consciousness by returning to the immediacy of experience. Indeed, the strength of the phenomenological approach lies precisely in its fidelity to experience. By focusing on the lived world, the world of experience, researchers take into account that before any objective, predicative, or reflective experience there is a body-subject who experiences; the pre-reflective lived experience. The body-subject is peculiar to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology where the body itself is the perceiving subject (cf. Merleau-Ponty, 2004). In terms of outdoor recreation, where the human body's sensory-perceptual flux is so obviously central to the experience with nature the Merleau-Pontian standpoint appears to be an apropos posture from which to explore phenomena outside of the natural attitude. However, by incorporating and building on Merleau-Ponty's work, specifically his notion of the 'flesh', we can take one step closer to begin to unearth a more inclusive account of experiential recreation by not privileging

intentionality over or setting it against causality. While phenomenology in general and this dissertation specifically, looks to begin with the pre-reflective experience where knowledge has its origin, the distinction between pre-reflective and reflective experience should be conceived properly as a continuum (Csordas, 1990). Indeed, Dilthey (1989) postulated seven different modes of lived experience ranging from two as pre-reflective and 'immediate' to five as reflective and involving 'full clarification' and 'objective knowledge'.

In exploring the ecology of experience so inherent to outdoor recreation, a fitting rapprochement is an ecophenomenology that can "give us better access to nature…by supplementing intentionality structurally with non- or pre-intentional characteristics of nature…" (Wood, 2001, p. 80). Ecophenomenology therefore reworks Merleau-Ponty's 'flesh' as a middle ground of relationality between intentionality and causality; between the body and the breathing earth (cf. Abrams, 2005). This seminal point of departure reveals the always already relationship between ecology and phenomenology as a "sort of conversation, carried on underneath our spoken discourse" (Abrams, 1988, p. 101) and in which the "relation between present experience and the complexity of what is being experienced has always been deeply complex and stratified" (Wood, 2001, p. 80). As a result, an ecophenomenological approach to outdoor recreation experiences is uniquely prepared to examine not only what is an ecological experience but what is contextually experienced at different modes of experience. While both levels of

investigation seek to deconstruct the natural attitude thereby revealing a more inclusive account, the later, in this study, is specifically concerned with engaging those aspects of experience that are concealed in reflective, culturally mediated and hegemonic forces. Hence, in view of this study as a rigorous and honorable project, I must work to understand "those premises which by virtue of their familiarity permit the exclusion and dismissal of particular lived experiences" (Connelly & Craig, 2002, p.457). This point is that much more important when considering recreation experiences in the United States (or on the AT as I will show) within a dominant wilderness ideology. Indeed, the dominant discourse that forms this ideology of wilderness and wilderness experience, Fox (2000) considers, "is far more complex than imagined and carries unconscious, sometimes invisible meanings, which do not disappear simply because we are unaware of those forces or because we did not intend those messages" (p. 49).

1.4 WILDERNESS IDEOLOGY

The significance of ideological framing is widely accepted (Fowler, 1991) and theorists suggest the majority of people in a society "do not generally reflect upon the ideological foundation for our society, and our reliance thereupon becomes submerged in consciousness and obscured by the immediate pursuit of particular goals and/or objectives" (Cantrill, 1996, p. 85). Specific to environmental issues, Cotgrove (1982) suggests that an ideology acts as a "framework of meaning within which 'facts' and experiences acquire significance and can be interpreted," and

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because they "serve the function of legitimating or justifying courses of action" (p. 26, 88). In a similar vein for this study, I adopt Meisner's (2003) position so that the term ideology "will be used to refer to the taken-for-granted mix of values, attitudes, beliefs, knowledges, and practices that constitute a sensibility or disposition toward the natural world" (p. 6). Oftentimes hikers expect, as do many outdoor recreationists, to experience the alterity, the Otherness of nature most commonly conceptualized in the cultural self-enclosure (cf. Plumwood, 2001a) of the urbanized West. Hence, it is reasonable to suggest that in both Canada and the United States, as part of the West, distinctive and dominant views of nature and wilderness have developed (Dubasak, 1990; Heintzman, 1997; Henderson, 1992; Kline, 1970; Nelson, 1989; Rutledge & Vold, 1995). Particularly in the United States as Perry Miller (1956) once observed, "Nature, in America…means wilderness" (p. 204). The archetype of this view is the Occidental ideology of wilderness or what Callicott and Nelson (1998) refer to as the "received wilderness idea" (p. 2). What is implicit in many conventional recreation studies relating to recreationists engaged in some form of backcountry experience is the romantic vision of the possibilities for a "wilderness experience". Given this premise for outdoor recreation experiences in the United States, (i.e., thru-hiking on the AT) whether in legislated (*de jure*) wilderness or *de facto* wilderness, what is inherently undermined is the chance to encounter nature in a dynamic and ecological or, interactive, manner and effectually negates any social or otherwise component. This is the dialectical essence of wilderness ideology, namely,

an ecocentric or biocentric expectation of nature with an anthropocentric attitude of disengagement and disenchantment with nature, when those expectations are not fulfilled. Consequently, the map is not the territory. That is, the notion of a wilderness experience, embodied in the moniker 'AT experience', whether constructed through the reductions of social scientists or popularized in literary works and reproduced through hegemonic forces are not well reflected in many hikers' actual experience. For example, the constant struggle for social scientists to document romantic notions of wilderness solitude and actual experiences (cf. Hall, 2001; Hollenhorst, Frank, & Watson, 1994; Patterson & Hammitt, 1990; Roggenbuck, Williams, & Watson, 1993) as well as the positive experiential evaluations regardless of the conditions encountered (cf. Cole, 2004; Manning, 1999; Stewart & Cole, 2001) is witness to the vast array of experiences obtainable. Therefore, the notion of a grand wilderness experience within these 'green' corridors is, at best, a misnomer and when a disjunction appears "between what one experiences as real and what is officially reported as real, conflict is inevitable" (Evernden, 1993, p. 25). Hence, it is a philosophical underpinning of this study that long-distance trails, such as the AT, are socially constructed buffer zones or as Plumwood (2001b) prefers, 'cosmetic strips', so that what hikers really encounter is a signifier of wilderness (Vogel, 1998). In short, revealing the pervasiveness of a wilderness ideology in the USA opens this research to a vast array of rich experiential phenomena. The AT traverses several legislative wilderness areas in part and goes

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through other types of land designation as well. The trail is therefore not wholly

comprised as a *de jure* wilderness area. But this may be a moot point – the ideology

of a wilderness experience remains as intimately intertwined in the symbolism of the

AT. As Smith and Watson (1979) suggest, "Wilderness boundaries depend on

attitudes and appearances as much as on the physical environment" (p. 61). The

ideology of wilderness is so pervasive, particularly in American culture (Nash, 2001),

that it is reasonable to suggest many AT thru-hikers expect to experience wilderness

and to have a wilderness experience, yet their experiences vary greatly. However,

though arguing that a dominant discourse exists within the wilderness ideology, I am

not suggesting that the ideologies we hold as individuals and as groups are all that

contribute to how we perceive and act towards more-than-human nature. Even within

American culture, wilderness experiences, outdoor experiences and the AT

experience can pre-reflectively vary greatly with individuals and groups, as I will

show, irrespective of the ideological influence.

1.5 POSTCOLONIALISM

There are many commentaries that discuss the extensive reach of the Colonial

British Empire which dramatically transformed the landscapes of economics, politics,

social structures, ethnicities, nature and ideas about nature (cf. Crosby, 1986;

Drayton, 2000; Griffith & Robbins, 1997). Moreover, although direct British colonial

control no longer exists, its colonizing influence can be seen throughout the world in

various manifestations. Likewise, postcolonial theory and its subsequent literature is

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intended not to suggest an epochal stage of postcolonialism but to address the legacy of colonial influence in the various landscapes of life. Adapting the propositions upon which postcolonial theory (Moore-Gilbert, 1997; Williams & Chrisman, 1994) is based, we can begin to see how our own experiences in outdoor recreation have been colonized by a dominant discourse and manifested in scholarly journals, management guidelines, literary classics and popular magazines. Furthermore, the extensive history of colonizing nature (cf. Adams & Mulligan, 2003) underpins conventional experiential discourse, such as wilderness experiences. As colonialism set out to enlighten the world, through conquering the wildness of 'uncivilized' peoples and nature (Adams & Mulligan, 2003), romanticism set out to protect this newly conquered wildness against the accepted growing pains of colonization. The basic assumption here is that nature, and the indigenes living within, must be partitioned, controlled and appropriated if natural resources are to be available for preservation, recreation and sustainable development. As a result, these foundations provided the concepts for protected areas where, if nature is partially protected from human change but appropriately arranged, both through restoration or naturalization, the visitor can experience the aesthetics and qualities nature should offer (Eder, 1996). These views have been propounded, in various ways, by the Trancendentalists (Emerson & Thoreau), the Naturalists (Audubon & Muir), and the early practitioners (Pinchot, Mather & Leopold) on through the neo-romantic and neo-colonial views in outdoor recreation research.

Subsequently, when nature is colonized and appropriated accordingly, conventional researchers and managers focus on specific experiential outcomes (i.e., solitude, adventure, restorative effects, and self-actualization) which usually comprise a beneficial focus for the recreationist. Not only does this approach possibly neglect the actual nature of an experience (Stewart, 1998), it fails to fully acknowledge the emergent, dynamic, and hence, multiphasic nature of an experience. Furthermore, by focusing on beneficial outcomes, sometimes characterized as extraordinary or peak experiences (cf. Arnould & Price, 1993; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), researchers and managers discount the significance of ordinary, quotidian experiences encountered in outdoor recreation, perhaps most notably during an extended journey such as thru-hiking the AT. In this light, and for the purposes of this study, postcolonial theory is engaged as a heuristic device in which to illuminate not only the colonization of outdoor recreation experiences, but to explicate the nuances of experiential colonization within the vicissitudes of experience. To be sure, my use of postcolonial theory is limited in this regard in order to focus on the colonization of outdoor recreation experiences through a dominant wilderness ideology.

1.6 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is: (1) to examine the lived experience of long distance hikers, specifically that of thru-hikers on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, with the intent of presenting a more inclusive yet contextualized account of an outdoor recreation experience; and (2) to gain some insight concerning what thru-

hikers experience against the background of a dominant wilderness ideology. Given

the opportunity to expand upon current experiential concepts and understand

alternative ways of experiencing serves to benefit: (1) the participants through giving

voice to their specific experience (s), (2) practitioners by offering concepts that can

enrich their understanding of experiential recreation for management and policy

making, and (3) the academic community with a fuller understanding of experiential

recreation that is emergent, dynamic, contextualized, and embraces social (and

ecological) interaction.

1.6.1 Research Objectives

Although this study is inductive in nature and hence, accommodating in the

inquiry process, several research objectives serve to guide the study in its

achievement of the aforementioned purpose. My research objectives are:

1) *To critically examine the concept of experience and experiential derivatives*

    commonly found in outdoor recreation literature and the extent to which these

    are related to actual thru-hiker experiences.

Utilizing both postcolonial theory and ecophenomenology to deconstruct the

theoretical and methodological aspects of understanding outdoor recreation

experiences, this dissertation proposes a decolonization process to examine

experience through the pursuit of the relationalities of ecological engagement. This

pursuit concerns both an ecological phenomenology and a phenomenological ecology

where various experiences are considered in light of the mode of experience. Once again, by examining all experiences rather than privileging or concealing several experiences for this study, the critical lens of postcolonial theory is engaged.

2) *To provide an ecophenomenological account of experiential recreation in the context of thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail.*

Here, following Merleau-Ponty's (1962) seminal work in existential-phenomenology, I seek to investigate the processes of meaning-making through his concept of 'the flesh' and hence, the embodied nature of people's experiences. However, this objective could only be partially approached if recent advances from ecophenomenology (cf. Abram, 1996; Brown & Toadvine, 2003), which build upon Merleau-Pontian perspectives, were not integrated. Hence, a significant portion of the dissertation will be devoted to discussing the dimensions of AT thru-hikers' experience undertaken through a methodological *bricolage*.

1.6.2 Guiding Questions

Following the purpose of this study, I developed the following guiding questions in order to address the study's objectives. Guiding questions reflect the conceptual structure of the inquiry and in a general sense "carve out the intellectual workspaces" (Piantanida & Garman, 1998, p. 93) of the research. The following questions direct the specifics of this inquiry:

1. What is (an) experience and what does it mean to thru-hikers?

2. How do pre-reflective and reflective modes of experience coalesce?

3. What are the vicissitudes that comprise the essence of a thru-hiker's experience?

4. What dynamics reproduce a colonizing effect on the experiences of AT thru-hikers?

5. How does ideology infuse experience?

1.7 THE GROUND UPON WHICH I STAND

While it is normal to disclose information, however anonymous, about participants that serve to inform the study, it is equally important to disclose information about the researcher since research emerges from a meeting between individuals. Hence, if I am going to tell you about my participants, I better tell you about me. By revealing my background, I hope to illuminate assumptions and biases that inform my inquiry; what Dupuis (1999) calls, "the *full* self" (p. 60, italics in original). Furthermore, I hope to present the reader with a monologue that sets the stage for my work as a *bricolage* (cf. Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Locating myself as researcher in this study represents a 'full circle' experience. My interest in pursuing a Ph.D. in Recreation and Leisure Studies emerged from recreation activities I have engaged in for several years. Moreover, the specific interest in this topic for my dissertation research emerged from my discontent with what I deemed as an unsatisfactory approach to praxis in the field and theory in the literature. Hence, I

return to the location from where my interests began in order to conduct the fieldwork for this study.

I grew up in rural Ontario in the Kawartha Lakes region. My parents, settling in the small community where my father was raised on the edge of 'Cottage Country', connected me historically to a period that existed prior to many of the social changes that were happening in 'the city', Toronto. Although my father never finished his first year of high school, he has never let his lack of formal education hinder his desire to think critically about the world around him. In many ways, he has always regarded the prevailing 'pop culture' and ensuing ideologies as counter to his way of life. It was not until many years later, living in a different region of the world and beginning my graduate work, that I started to reflect on and understand my father's peculiarly counterculture resistance to the modernist bureaucracies growing around him.

When I was ten, my father, reflecting on his then, current job and young family and with his affinity for adventure intact, he left the life of a factory worker to pursue the prospects of sole proprietorship. While my parents worked hard to provide me and my four siblings with a comfortable lifestyle, I was also recruited to play an active role in the family business. Although during the years which I worked in this capacity were not appreciated at the time, the sometimes difficult-to-learn lessons about responsibility, ethical decision-making and hard work was a powerful education. It was the interaction of working with my father at hard physical labor that

planted the seeds for both a love of the outdoors and a critical perspective of what I might choose for a career.

As I came of age I began to realize that my athletic prowess in running could, quite literally, help pay for my post-secondary education. This ignited a dual effort to apply learned principles in both athletics and education at Liberty University, a small university nestled close to the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, USA. While at the time of my first semester my zeal for academic life had waned, little did I know I was following a path that would lead me to combine my passion for running, being outdoors and engaging in critical discourse. Over time, running led me to trail running and fostered an intense desire to spend more time in the mountains, gaining an intuitive understanding of my ecological self. Returning home from the mountains each time increased an appreciation for the 'simpler life'; not a romantic ideal but a way to intellectually address the depersonalization, the rationality, and the social regulation of modernism and its institutions that my father had so often discussed.

Throughout the course of my Ph.D. program, my reading of selected recreation literature seemed to suggest that this literature's concepts were counterintuitive thereby affirming so many intuitive feelings I had and still experience when situated in my trail environs. Moreover, the environmental philosophy and ethical literature has resonated so profoundly with my perspective on outdoor recreation, that it provoked me to seek more than just an intellectual understanding. As such, I wanted my doctoral research to play a pivotal role in my

personal search through academic research of not only the way I think about my ecological relationship with the earth but how I live out and experience my socio-ecological self in society. Therefore, to the extent that this dissertation is an emergent research project, my hope is that it serves to fulfill my personal objectives and the academic objectives set forth in this chapter.

Throughout this dissertation, I am highly critical of some research that has been conducted in the field and yet I am also deeply indebted to the respective researchers. While I believe these approaches offer useful insights into outdoor recreation, it would be rather naïve to offer this project as exhaustive. And without prior thought, there would be no thinking to be rethought. Nonetheless, as prior thought is deconstructed, new paradigms are often seen as discarding the old. Instead of standing on the shoulders of our intellectual predecessors, we take an axe to their knees. In this light, the academic project is seen as "intellectual deforestation" (Wolf, 1990, p. 588). However, my axe is not aimed at the knees of recreation researchers whom I have critiqued; rather my academic project is intended to challenge the Marcusian 'One-Dimensional Man' portrait of thought so often diffused into academic discourse.

Subsequently, this dissertation specifically and critically examines experiential notions derived from a pervasive wilderness ideology that finds its underpinnings in the colonization of nature. Perhaps most importantly, while I broadly critique the literature and the notion of a wilderness ideology, I consciously

delimit my implications to those experiences found amongst AT thru-hikers.

Ironically, I would be the first person to pragmatically advocate for more wilderness

legislation or engage in grass-roots activism for the preservation of wilderness while

at the same time being philosophically disengaged from my efforts. For me, this

dialectic is much more than a series of contradictions; it is a process whereby the

formal enclosure of natural (i.e., non-developed) areas is desirable given the *current*

cultural, political, and technological means of organization within our modern mode

of production and at the same time believing that philosophy can be "the most potent

force of social change imaginable" (Callicott, 1995, p.19) for an intellectual genesis

of environmental ethics.

From this dialectic an ethical continuum ranging from pragmatism to

foundationalism serves as a benchmark in which to locate some of my values. While

I remain a staunch supporter of foundational ethics as the basis for values, contextual

and pragmatic experiences will only serve to cultivate values further. In light of this,

I optimistically believe that a modified and divergent understanding of experiential

recreation is essential for its implications towards ecologism.[2] Contrary to anti-

foundational ethicist Ben Minteer's (1998) polemic, "No experience necessary?", I

believe there are powerful examples of how ecological experiences have significantly

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[2] To the extent that environmentalism has stagnated, being co-opted through the greenwashing of liberal politics and corporatism, my research project is an insurgent discourse in ecologism (Baxter, 2000). Environmental thought or environmentalism is often distinguished from ecological thought or ecologism, regarding the former as reformist and the latter as revolutionary (Giddens, 1994).

nurtured a person's ecological ethics, even for foundational ethicists. For example,

Liszka (2003) argues Leopold's Almanac 'shack stories', as gleaned

from experience, are more persuasive than his 'land ethic', as gleaned from

intellectual pursuits and Kohak (1987) uses his lived experiences of dwelling in a

mountain cottage as the building blocks of his seminal thoughts for

ecophenomenology. For me, an ancillary component of this dissertation that underlies

my overall research agenda in general is to see outdoor recreationists become

ecologically literate. As I envision, this is accomplished through reading both

literature and landscape; the former is intellectual, the later is experiential. As a

caveat, my sense of ecology is not a reductionistic view, like Meriam-Webster holds

to in the classical and natural science sense, but literally *Oekologie*, the household of

nature, including the global human household. In this way, ecological literacy

involves much more than just the ability to read the environment in biophysical terms,

it also means to be able to comprehend the cultural dimensions of landscapes and

discern the experiential exchange between oneself and others (human and non-

human) in working towards ecological sustainability (Orr, 1992; Stables, 1998;

Stables & Bishop, 2001). To nurture ecological literacy Golley (1998) emphasizes

direct experiences that:

> emphasize feeling the landscape through all the senses… experience is the
>
> trigger for environmental literacy. It ignites curiosity and tests the muscles. It

teaches us that we live in a world that is not of human making, that does not

play by human rules. (p. x)

Herein lies my interest in AT thru-hikers. From extensive personal experience, I feel

I know about the AT and the thru-hiker community. First, the Appalachian Trail

environment – the trail corridor – is both natural, meaning it is comprised of dirt,

trees, wildlife, etc., and it is artificial, meaning it is highly-managed as a socially and

physically constructed pathway through the Appalachian Mountains that creates a

buffer zone from the rest of the world. Second, thru-hikers know of the AT's fame

and seek the experience that so many before them have read about, extensively talked

about and written in innumerable publications. As a researcher, I not only want to

understand more beyond my own personal experience by learning from others, but I

see the Appalachian Trail thru-hiker experience as particularly suited to explicating

the colonization of experience through wilderness ideology – not because the AT is

an east coast trail of the USA and 'wilderness doesn't really exist in the east' – but

precisely because the ideology of wilderness is so pervasive and it does physically

exist in the eastern USA it is more readily available for study from the hundreds of

annual thru-hikers to the accessibility of the trail and the level at which the 'received

wilderness idea' can be understood in contrast to its more elusive western USA

counterparts. Moreover, engaging in a critical investigation to address the purposes

of this study is seminal to the way I view research. To the extent that methodology is

also a *bricolage* for the interpretive researcher, that is, a combination of standing on

my predecessors' shoulders and creative personal expression, I strive to embody an active, collaborative role as researcher by engaging in an activity that is both part of my past experiences and scholarly investigation. Employing such a reflective awareness, I attempt to monitor my relationship with participants and my representation of their experiences throughout this study.

One last reflection - in view of the fact that thru-hikers' experiences occur while hiking the AT, my proposed research approach was to hike the trail myself. In this sense, my role as researcher was to include a position where I assumed an 'active membership role' (Adler & Adler, 1987); meaning I actually would be a thru-hiker. I had envisioned initiating my journey on the AT at its southern terminus, Springer Mountain, Georgia, hiking and average of twenty-two miles a day for approximately 100 days and finishing at is northern terminus, Mount Katadhin, Maine. In fact, with my research proposal approved, I started hiking May 1, 2006. However, my own thru-hike came to an abrupt end only five days later when, standing in a stream collecting water to drink, I somehow slipped on the rocks and twisted my knee. Initially ignoring the pain I continued that day another five miles to Bly Gap, just across the Georgia-North Carolina State line. Upon awaking the next morning I knew my hike was over and facing a 45 km hike northward to the next major road crossing, I opted to return south 13 km to the previous day's road crossing and off the AT.

Not to be detoured easily from my scholarly mission, I decided to employ my trusty old Volkswagen camper van as a mobile research unit where I could drive to

intercept points along the AT, camp and simply wait until thru-hikers came along to interview. This prospect turned out to not only be opportune and successful but the thru-hikers that became research participants helped my morale as they were empathetic with my situation. Several thru-hikers were battling minor aggravations, others had gotten off trail earlier to heal and then return and one other had abandoned his thru-hike several years earlier for a similar reason. Moreover, the simple fact that I had started the trail and attempted a thru-hike, albeit for only five days, made me a thru-hiker at the time, just as I was interviewing hikers that were attempting their own thru-hike with no guarantee of a successful completion. I had adopted the trail name, Lounge Lizard, and as I conversed with these other thru-hikers with similarly obscure trail names, I seemed to have instant rapport, immediate identification in the trail community as we shared our personal stories. One section hiker that I encountered mentioned me in her blog:

> I hiked 7 miles in lovely sunny but cool weather to Marble Springs Campsite. Along the way, I met some thru-hikers: Pumpkin, Pepperoni (whom we gave a ride to Pearisburg), Caboose and Walkabout (picked them up on the Parkway), Energizer Bunny, and Lounge Lizard. Interestingly, Lounge Lizard was sitting next to a van at a forest service road about halfway through today's hike, with sodas, fruit, cookies, etc. When I asked what he was doing, he said that he had started the trail, but only got a few days into it (in Georgia) when he injured his knee. The interesting thing is that he was doing his dissertation

research -- he's working on a degree in Recreation and Leisure Studies --
while hiking the trail. Sound familiar? When I heard this, I immediately took
off my pack, sat down, and chatted for a while. I wish him the best -- in fact,
it's probably for the best that he was injured. Though it means he won't get to
hike the trail, he'll probably do a better job of his dissertation than I did.

(Rush, 2006, June 2)

Whether the injury allowed me to do a better job in this study will forever be
unknown. However, my experience enabled me to reflect on the potential that
invariably looms over any journey to suddenly change course and I believe that gave
me a valuable perspective within this dissertation and, for a brief period, I was a thru-
hiker.

1.8 THE JOURNEY FROM HERE

Having outlined the motivating issues and values that led to the ideas upon
which this study is based, I would like to now provide a general overview of my
written journey from here. Written is an exhaustive and discursive manner, Chapter 2
can be viewed as containing two main foci underpinned by postcolonial theory and
ecophenomenology, respectively. The former is more theoretical in its examination
of the literature; the latter is intended to set the stage for empirical study. Hence,
Chapter 2 begins with a brief exposition of postcolonial theory and its relevance to
this dissertation followed with an apropos account of wilderness. Moving to a more
contextualized example, I then trace a brief history of the Appalachian Trail and

outline how wilderness ideology is intertwined with the AT. Postcolonial theory

provides the critical lens through which we can understand the impact of wilderness

ideology on the development of the AT, the representation of wilderness through

various mediums and ultimately the colonizing influence on thru-hikers' experiences.

It is through this literature review that allows the reader to recognize my review of the

subsequent literature as a critique of the field's dominant views of experience and

how this hegemony essentially represents the colonization of experiential outdoor

recreation. Following this review, I then proceed to discuss this study's innovative

focus on experience, most notably its ecophenomenological underpinnings, with its

grounding in Merleau-Pontian existential phenomenology. With my critical position

on the colonization of experience explicated, a discourse on ecophenomenology

provides the point of departure to engage in empirical research.

I turn in Chapter 3 to detail the methodology of this study. In the process, my

intent is to reveal a phenomenological study is more than simply a seriatim of steps or

a body of methods, but a posture when approaching research. In doing the research, I

present ecologically-active interviews, a methodical *bricolage* that creatively

emerged out of necessity while in the field and in collaboration with my research

participants. After discussing the nuances of this creative approach to collecting

empirical materials, I discuss the explication process of the collected materials

followed by a précis in evaluating the research project.

Transitioning to the findings of my research, Chapter 4 explicates the dimensions of the thru-hiking experience that emerged in this study as Perseity, Sojourning, Kinship, and Wild Imbrication. These findings provide the foundation from which Chapter 5 extends the foray into issues of experiential colonization through wilderness ideology. Both chapters exhibit extensive narrative excerpts thereby providing the foundation upon which both description and interpretation of research findings are discussed.

Subsequently, Chapter 6 attends specifically to the implications of the findings for both the academy and praxis. In so doing, I consider suggestions for research methodology, experiential recreation research, conceptualizations of wilderness, and adaptive management strategies. Finally, I also outline limitations of the project and the possibility of future research directions that opened from this dissertation.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS

2.1 COLONIAL DISCOURSE AND POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

Colonial discourse is directly connected to British imperialism where the colonial impetus had its intellectual roots in the Enlightenment movement which began with a commitment to a rational science (Dickens, 2004). This commitment to rationality had already been provided for by the Cartesian dichotomy (Lothian, 1999) of mind/body (or culture/nature) and the movement firmly placed "a superiority of mind over matter and of humans over 'non-rational' nature" (Adams & Mulligan, 2003, p. 3). Hence, the domination of the non-human was seen as bringing reason or enlightenment to the wild.

Stated in rudimentary terms, postcolonial theory, also referred to as colonial discourse analysis, is about dealing with the legacy of colonialism (Moore-Gilbert, 1997; Williams & Chrisman, 1994). With Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism* widely recognized as the seminal work for the field, colonial discourse has a temporal genesis similar to environmental thought (Sachs, 2003). Hence, intellectual thought revealing the colonization of nature (cf. Adams & Mulligan, 2003) is as heuristic and historic as work concerning the egregious colonization of humans. In an illustration of Marcusian irony it remains one of the most widely accepted notions, from classical times to the present, that human freedom from the 'domination of man by nature' entails the domination of human by human as the earliest means of production and the

use of human beings as instruments for harnessing the natural world (Bookchin, 2003). For the purposes of this study, the domination of nature and the domination of some people through a colonial discourse of nature, environment, and the more-than-human in perpetuating our Eurocentric and anthropocentric experiences in outdoor recreation will be explored. However, my use of postcolonial theory is with a strict abidance to the colonizing effect of wilderness ideology on AT thru-hikers and, as such, is not engaged to explore other important colonizing issues such as power relationships, otherness, doubleness, resistance and many more. In addition, I recognize my privileged position as a white, male, North American in my use of postcolonial theory in order to suggest a self-reflexivity of my own recreational experiences and to situate myself in this study.

Accordingly, the conventional experiential outcomes of outdoor recreation such as solitude, escape, challenge, etc. as being unique to 'wilderness' environments (whether *de facto* or *de jure*) represent the hegemonic view of cultural self-enclosure (cf. Plumwood, 2001b) and marginalize other experiences that may be quotidian or more social in nature. Thus, to be "one of the colonized is potentially to be a great many different, but inferior, things, in many different places, at many different times" (Said, 1989, p. 207). This perspective is increasingly apparent in a world of urbanization and globalization and has been a seminal part of an Occidental nature (i.e., Turner's frontier thesis, romanticism, etc.). In light of this, postcolonial theory can help researchers recognize this naturalistic fallacy and move beyond

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conceptualizations like "the story that pervades outdoor adventure is that it is a setting in which we experience life in a more authentic way" (Sharpe, 2005a, p. 45) instead of just another way. Ultimately, this view compels us to radically change our perceptions of nature, not just in distant protected areas but also in our backyards, greenways and city parks.

Furthermore, by engaging the critical stance of postcolonial theory, I recognize both its position and limitation in examining the literature on recreation experiences. Just as we oscillate between modernity and postmodernity, industrialization/post-industrialism, etc., we still live in the age of Enlightenment and hegemonic discourses associated with the age of reason that still infuse the present. The colonization of nature has not ceased, although it has lessened or taken different forms, and therefore to suggest an epochal stage of postcoloniality for recreation experiences would be erroneous (cf. Hall, 1996; Shohat, 1992; Willems-Braun, 1997). Nevertheless, despite the diversity of outdoor experiences, colonial discourses create illusions that lead to the homogenization and marginalization of variegate experiences. As such, the imperative is to avoid essentializing all experiences while exposing the dynamics that reproduce colonized experiences within a particular ideology – for this study it is the colonized experiences of AT thru-hikers within a dominant wilderness ideology. In order to understand how AT thru-hikers' experiences are colonized we must first examine the dominant wilderness ideology.

2.2 THE STOIC WILDERNESS

Wilderness is a venerable concept that has become the attention of a protracted debate centered on wilderness as an *idea* and wilderness as a *place*. Distinguishing between the two is important to understand their relationship and respective ideological contribution. Wilderness as a place is furthered delineated as *de jure* wilderness and *de facto* wilderness. The former is legislatively designated and protected under the United States Wilderness Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-577, 78 Stat. 890, http://wilderness.nps.gov/document/WildernessAct%2Epdf) and, while the later is similar in important respects it lacks the legal designation. The Act reads:

> A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may

also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value. (sec. 2. para. C)

What logically follows for wilderness as a place is that *de jure* wilderness areas literally are divested from tracts of *de facto* wilderness lands. Moreover, such an idealized and crafted account of wilderness as place is derived from an ideal conception of wilderness. It is this conception, what has become known as the "received idea of wilderness" (Callicott & Nelson, 1998, p. 2) as a collection of beliefs and images that have crystallized over time that is now popularly associated with both *de facto* and *de jure* wilderness. As Nash (2001) suggests, "The emphasis here is not so much what wilderness is but what men [and women] *think* it is" with "the focus on belief rather than actuality" (p. 5-6, italics in original). To the extent that ideologies and beliefs work through the process of representation in portraying an abstract ideological concept (Meisner, 2003) wilderness has historically held different beliefs at different times and therefore been represented in many ways. To the extent that this dissertation is concerned particularly with the current American usage of wilderness, being fully aware of its complex historical roots beyond the shores of North America, I limit my discussion of this concept to a discreet historical reference point grounded in mid-19th century America. Arguably the most influential work in this genre is Nash's (1967/2001) classic, *Wilderness and the American Mind*; a careful and historical account of wilderness.

Subsequently, in light of colonial rule changing over time albeit through different forms of neo-colonialism (Sluyter, 1999), it is important to understand that as a result, wilderness ideals has changed dramatically in the United States. Des Jardins (1993) builds on Nash's exhaustive commentary and identifies three distinct models, perhaps phases, of wilderness ideology in this segment of American history. First, the puritan model views wilderness as a spiritual desolation that is avoided and feared until it must be overcome and conquered by early European settlers in the new world. Second, the Lockean model suggests that, following Locke's theory of the creation of property, a settler society cultivates and transforms the wilderness into the raw materials needed to sustain civilization. Finally, the romantic model is perhaps the most enduring and certainly the most germane ideology for recreationists. Born as a symbol of purity and innocence, urban elites, like artists and writers who did not endure the survival struggles of pioneer life, began to associate aesthetic, spiritual and symbolic values with wilderness. As such, romantic ideals lead to the positive valuation of wilderness and subsequent calls to preserve it so as to protect the experience it provides. Indeed, what each person knows about wilderness and how they experience it is influenced by these representations.

Perhaps no more important to this representation of wilderness in the mid-19th century is Henry David Thoreau's (1817-1862) writings. In *Walking* (1852/2005) Thoreau's famous dictum "in wildness is the preservation of the world" sounded a rallying cry for efforts to preserve and in *Walden* (1854/1995) he extolled the virtues

of solitude as experiencing wilderness. Moreover, wilderness symbolized the

opportunity to experience nature as a visitor where "one should alternate between

wilderness and civilization" to the extent that "with this concept Thoreau led the

intellectual revolution that was beginning to invest wilderness with attractive rather

than repulsive qualities" (Nash, 2001, p. 95). Building on Thoreau's insight, John

Muir (1838-1914) was an enthusiastic spokesperson whose main focus was

wilderness preservation in the founding of the Sierra Club but also advocating the

wilderness experience by writing extensively on the subject (cf. Muir, 1989, 1992).

With an underlying didactic in his composition, Muir wrote with the American people

in mind and published in widely-read periodicals such as *Century, Atlantic Monthly,*

Harper's, and the *New York Tribune*. Muir's political ideals for wilderness also did

much in generating popular acceptance of the wilderness ideology. For example,

while the great Hetch Hetchy controversy was essentially one of preservation versus

land development, the almost twenty-year length of the debate stirred national interest

so much so that by the early twentieth century wilderness "had attained the

dimensions of a national cult…Muir could take some pride in this phenomenon,

because his life work had been devoted to bringing it about" (Nash, 2001, p.139-140).

There are numerous others (i.e., Emerson, Audubon, Marshall, and Leopold) who

have contributed to bringing the experiential values of wilderness to many Americans

in a compelling way but time and space does not permit me to explicate their specific

contributions. Nevertheless, I would be remiss to not discuss the continued

receptivity of wilderness in the American mind to the representation of wilderness.

Returning for a moment to my previous mention of wilderness as place,

Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932) was an influential figure in developing a

relationship between the ideal of wilderness with the place. Although Turner's

(1920/1986) Frontier Thesis, which was initially published in the September 1896

issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, was nominally concerned with American development

through westward settlement, the frontier, with wilderness as the basic ingredient, is

an essential influence on American culture. "The frontier" declared Turner (1932),

"is …determined by the reactions between wilderness and the edge of expanding

settlement" (p. 183). In the absence of great cultural antiquities of which Europe had

many, cultural identity became associated with the wilderness out of which America

carved itself. As Hargrove (1989) asserts, because "wildness has been regarded as

the special characteristic that sets the beauty of American scenery apart from that of

Europe" (p. 82) it follows that wilderness became the symbol of America's national

pride. Furthermore, Turner (1986) extolled this national pride as not simply different

to but better than the European because, "out of his wilderness experience, out of the

freedom of his opportunities, he fashioned a formula for social regeneration – the

freedom of the individual to seek his own" even though the "rough conquest of the

wilderness is accomplished" (p.213 & 244). Not only did Turner provide impetus for

linking wilderness experiences with one country's national pride and culture, his

thesis on the closure of the frontier represented wilderness as a place that now had to be consciously sought out for enjoyment. The numerous experiential beliefs as expressed by these influential figures combined with the need to locate places in which to recreate are among the many precursors of the 1964 Wilderness Act. However as already identified, *de jure* wilderness areas simply come from *de facto* wilderness lands upon which the wilderness idea is based and herein lies the trouble with the received idea of wilderness, wilderness ideology, and wilderness experiences.

2.3 THE WILDERNESS CRITIQUE

Broadly speaking, the wilderness critique exposes the flaws that are rooted in the discourse of colonial enlightenment and girded by Cartesian dualisms of a nature not only fully independent of but in opposition to human culture, vis-à-vis the pristine myth. In light of this, wilderness "must be understood as recent, revolutionary, and still incomplete" (Nash, 2001, p. xiv). The notion of an unfinished and insufficient discourse on wilderness thought serves as a main point of departure for this research. More notably, wilderness and the concepts underpinning wilderness have been critically examined, most notably in Cronon's (1995) polemic and culminating in Callicott's & Nelson's (1998) collection of literary works, *The Great New Wilderness Debate*. While the wilderness debate has continued for over a century, many central foci are myopically concerned with statutory issues such as use versus preservation (cf. Cole, 2001; Kelson, 1998; Marshall, 1930; Scott, 2004; Walters, 2004). While

these issues can be important for managers in legislatively-designated areas, they perpetuate the received idea of wilderness instead of deconstructing it.

As a social construction, wilderness has been produced and privileged foremost by white, male Americans (Fox, 2000)[3]. The writings of women, African-Americans, or Native-Americans are rarely acknowledged (cf. Abajian, 1974; Blackett, 1986; Drimmer, 1987; Katz, 1973; Quarles, 1988). In particular, the seminal concepts upon which wilderness is conceived "separates humans from nature, denigrates native peoples, and freezes ecosystems in time" (Aplet, Thomson, & Wilbert, 2000, p. 89) and is "alleged to be ethnocentric, androcentric, phallocentric, unscientific, unphilosophic, impolitic, outmoded, even genocidal" (Callicott & Nelson, 1998, p. 2). With these claims against the received idea of wilderness the odds seems insurmountable, yet the ideology remains. Furthermore, my critique is not to dissolve and discard the received idea completely but to understand the formal claims against it in order to further examine the ideology and its colonization of experience. Indeed, the legacy of wilderness only reinforces its pervasiveness and resilience.

The basic premise of the wilderness critique is that most or all of North America was not *terra nullius* or pristine, but in fact was occupied and changed by people in the past. This premise is supported by a growing number of anthropologists, geographers, historians, philosophers and others. In fact, Denevan

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[3] It is important to note however, that even though this group represents the colonizers, the ideology produced colonizes their experiences as well.

(1992) suggests almost 4 million indigenous peoples existed in North America prior to European colonization which is a widely accepted approximation. The landscape changes associated with this population would be, arguably noticeable. Indeed, Botkin (1995) shrewdly points to the journal entry of Sergeant Gass, a member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, from June 17, 1806:

> And what were they doing searching for a road in the wilderness? And what was a road doing in the wilderness at all? Weren't Lewis and Clark, explorers of almost mythical proportions in America's heritage, supposed to be on the ultimate hike of a backpacker's dream, a 7,000 mile trek through wilderness untrammeled by human beings, undivided by roads? (p. 7)

To be sure, these roads were not the roads we know today but simply indigenous trails and stock pathways that the Lewis and Clark Expedition relied heavily on, just as they existed all over North America. In short, it is a well-established concept that indigenous populations preexisted European contact and impacted their environments to certain degrees (cf. Cronon, 1983; Josephy, 1991). However, Denevan (1992) also proposes that up to 90% of the 4 million indigenes in North America were gone by the end of the 18th century. Most sources point to European pathogens causing native epidemics (cf. Crosby, 1986) and/or entire indigenous populations being removed or killed. As such, over time the land Thoreau and others described appeared to be vacant of previous impacts along with settlers who chose to consciously ignore the influence of natives. Referring to Yosemite National Park in 1912, Muir wrote "in

general, views of no mark of man is visible upon it" (as reprinted in Muir, 1992, p. 614). Yet Native Americans had lived in Yosemite long before Muir arrived and commented on the area. In fact, Spence (1996) notes that the indigenous tribe were permitted to stay in Yosemite after it became a state park in 1864 and a national park in 1890 up until the 1930's when they were gradually forced out, the village burned for fire-fighting practice and replaced with a gas station and campground.

What I have attempted to demonstrate in this section is that in understanding wilderness it is important not to reify the ideals by abstracting both supportive and oppositional views from political complexity and historical contingency. In this sense, statutory wilderness in the USA, drawn from *de facto* lands and underpinned with the received idea of wilderness, while not undermining the objective use of wilderness (Cafaro, 2001), supports the subjective ideology of a wilderness experience. In short, whatever nomenclature someone uses to denote *de facto* or *de jure* wilderness does not preclude a person from presuppositions embodied in the ideology of a wilderness experience. "The romantic legacy means that wilderness is more a state of mind than a fact of nature, and the state of mind that today most defines wilderness is *wonder*" (Cronon, 1995, p. 88, italics in original). Indeed, 'wonder' is quintessentially conceived as the alterity, the otherness of wilderness and nature that pervades our urbanized culture of self-enclosure (Plumwood, 2001b). There is an abundance of researchers whose analytical fulcrum is the wonder of nature, wilderness and recreation experiences couched in the colonization of nature

itself. As a result, there is a paucity of literature devoted to understanding the colonizing effects of a dominant wilderness ideology upon experiential recreation in the United States.

To the extent that I have sufficiently deconstructed the received idea of wilderness thereby showing that *de facto* wilderness did not exist in North America (according to the received idea), there would be no point in proceeding further with this dissertation. There would be no wilderness land to experience wilderness and hikers would simply be walking in a solipsistic metaphysical wasteland. However, drawing upon a critical realist ontology, the critique itself is aimed at the metaphysical level. Just as the ideology of the wilderness concept remains so too does the land we call wilderness. As Soper (1995) writes:

> It is true that we can make no distinction between the 'reality' of nature and its cultural representation that is not itself conceptual, but this does not justify the conclusion that there is no ontological distinction between the ideas we have of nature and that which the ideas are about…In short, it is not language that has a hole in its ozone layer; and the 'real' thing continues to be polluted and degraded even as we refine out deconstructive insights at the level of the signifier. (p. 151)

This point is important as I lead into my next section. Although the received idea is conceptually flawed I have also written how the appearance of wilderness on the land returned over time. Although an affront to western wilderness aficionados, *de facto*

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wilderness can exist in previously impacted landscapes and indeed it does most

notably in the form of eastern USA wilderness where wilderness ideology still lurks.

To get here we need to think of wilderness in terms of a continuum.[4]

2.4 AN APPALACHIAN WILDERNESS

In 1539, the famous Spanish explorer, Hernando De Soto, explored the

Appalachian Mountains which he named after the Apalachee, a tribe of the

Muskhogean Indians living in northwest Florida (Connelley, 1996). Although the

Appalachian Mountains are about 2400 km (1500 miles) long within the political

boundaries of the United States, nowhere are they much over 160 km (100 miles)

wide, yet they have played a significant role in the development of the nation.

Indeed, while most consider the old west synonymous with the 100th meridian west,

Turner (1986) simply calls it the west, the Atlantic coast the oldest west and the old

west is reserved for "the nearest wilderness" that "took a century of Indian fighting

and forest felling for the colonial settlements to expand into the interior to a distance

of about a hundred miles" (p. 67) including the Appalachians. Nevertheless, there is

no informed debate over the degree to which the eastern United States has been

impacted from the settler society. Documentation and evidence is to be found from

various sources. For example, although forest cover was over 90% in 1492, forest

clearing reached its peak in the middle to late 19th century (Klyza, 2001). When

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[4] Although widely ignored, Leopold (1925) was the first to suggest this. "[W]ilderness exists in all
degrees, from the little accidental wild spot at the head of a ravine in a Corn Belt woodlot to vast
expanses of virgin country…wilderness is a relative condition" (p. 77).

Thoreau first visited northern Maine in 1846 he was on the cusp of witnessing the greatest decline in forest cover in the history of the United States. Ten years later Thoreau (1856/1906) wrote in his journal:

> When I consider that the nobler animals have been exterminated here, - the cougar, panther, lynx, wolverene [*sic*], wolf, bear, moose, deer, the beaver, the turkey, etc., etc., - I cannot but feel as if I lived in a tamed, and, as it were, emasculated country. (p. 220)

Klyza (2001) suggests that wilderness, in the eastern USA, should be thought of as "land that has recovered its ecological integrity or has the potential to do so, although it may at one time have been significantly altered by human actions" (p. 8). It is this notion that was accepted and incorporated into the Eastern Wilderness Act of 1975 (P.L. 93-205) allowing for smaller acreage, proximity to urban centers and evidence of human change. As a result, not only are eastern wilderness areas physically distinct from its western counterpart, they receive much higher use (Tarrant & Shafer, 1998) and yet are continually rewilding themselves. To this end conservationists in the United States have elevated eastern wilderness lands as "where wilderness preservation began" (Zahniser, 1998, p. 10) and where the "vector of wildness may actually be more remarkable…than anywhere in the West" (Elder, 2001, p. 257). Indeed, eastern wilderness, including *de facto* land, exemplifies the ecological recovery that can be achieved. The rewilding effort in recovering wilderness through ecological integrity requires large tracts of *de facto* wilderness not as isolated

'museums' of natural communities but connected wildernesses through corridors (Foreman, 2004; Sayen, 2001). This approach appears to be the future for preservation efforts and is becoming more common through projects such as the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y), Adirondacks to Algonquin Conservation Association (A2A), and most germane, the Appalachian Trail Corridor or Mega-transect. Current proposals suggest the AT is uniquely situated on the East coast as an ecoregional wilderness corridor with the ability to connect reserves and facilitate major range shifts for some species in the event of climate change (Hunter, Jacobson, & Webb, 1988, Sayen, 1987, 2001). While this specific eastern wilderness ideal and ecological purpose for the AT has only recently been recognized, the Appalachian Trail has a long and celebrated history of representing wilderness, primarily for recreational purposes. Indeed, "when wilderness is considered with respect to the experiences it makes possible, then many specialized forms of wilderness can be discerned" (Smith & Watson, 1979, p. 64); the AT represents one such specialized form.

Among other environmental concerns, the decline in eastern forests by the start of the 20th century signaled a need to reassess the use of American lands. By the 1920's, the preservation of wilderness was not only deemed a worthy cause by many Americans, it created a receptive context in which to present a long distance trail both as a recreational pathway through the wilderness and a bulwark or levee against urbanization. While many writers followed Frederick Jackson Turner in lamenting

the end of the frontier, others attempted to argue that the recreational wilderness trail was analogous to a frontier borderland but was in need of preservation. Hence, long distance trails became "the basis for linking primeval regions together into *de facto* wilderness barriers against further intrusions" (Wolar, 1998, p. iii) from urbanization. Arguably the most influential figure in creating the wilderness long trail was Benton MacKaye (1879-1975), a Harvard-educated forester, regional planning visionary, and father of the Appalachian Trail. Building on the impetus of the era, MacKaye published *An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning* which outlined:

> the possibility of combing the various efforts of trail-building in the eastern
> mountain country so as to effect a continuous wilderness foot-path along the
> Appalachian Mountain Range from Maine to Georgia, such super-trail being
> conceived as a backbone on which to build a series of public forests, parks,
> and open ways. (MacKaye, 1928/1962, p. xxiii)

Although the article was originally published in 1921, MacKaye's ideas were primarily conceived in the previous decade during a period of monastic retreat and contemplation, "comparable to Thoreaus's at Walden" (Mumford, cited in MacKaye, 1962, p. xiv). Indeed, Thoreau was a favorite writer of MacKaye who profoundly influenced his own writings and vision of the trail. MacKaye's ideas fell upon fertile ground and action towards implementing his proposal was almost immediate (McNamee, 1983). Subsequently, the route of the AT was negotiated by charter members of the ATC with private land owners and federal and state authorities and

constructed between 1923 and1937 through the efforts of hundreds of volunteers who were coordinated by the Appalachian Trail Conference, founded in 1925.

While hundreds of volunteers were engaged in corridor layout and constructing the physical treadway of the trail, MacKaye embarked on a series of speeches proselytizing "the need for the wilderness experience in our culture" (Bryant, 1965, p. 142). On January 21, 1927, MacKaye delivered an address to the New England Trail Conference that was subsequently published in *Landscape Architecture*. The purpose of this speech was to develop the notion of an 'outdoor culture'; a trail culture of wilderness enthusiasts embodied in the philosophy of long distance trails. Two years later, MacKaye (1929) published *Wilderness Ways* in the same journal as an effort to delineate the trail as "the basis for a complete wilderness way" where "the desire is linear not round, tangential and not circular" as a "geographic framework for the recreational and cultural development of the nation" (pp. 240, 242, 248). This increased attention to culture and wilderness, in relation to the Appalachian Trail is worth emphasizing. First, it is important to note that, for MacKaye, 'outdoor culture' was in opposition to modern outdoor recreation where the former was constructive and consciousness-raising while the latter was dependent on commercialization and was consciousness-numbing (Sutter, 1997). Second, MacKaye's (1929) wilderness ideal was conducive to the east coast both as a response to metropolitanism and as a modern planning construct; "we can restore the primeval forest" (p. 249), similar to the rewilding efforts discussed earlier. Shortly

after the publication of these articles, MacKaye (1932) wrote a piece for *Scientific Monthly* in which he highlighted the AT's aesthetic qualities as a way to articulate part of the trail's recreational experience. This article also was an interesting turning point for MacKaye. Since most previous writings included the trail as part of his broader regional plan as a socialist utopia for the east, MacKaye was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the prospect of this coming to fruition. In particular, when the Skyline Drive[5] was initiated in the 1930's as part of the New Deal agenda it threatened the wilderness integrity of the AT. MacKaye's foremost trail builder and president of the Appalachian Trail Conference, Myron Avery, sought to view the government's intrusion as a powerful ally in using the new government lands to protect the AT, even though the trail would parallel the Skyline Drive (Sutter, 2002). This turn of events enraged MacKaye and the difference of opinion over the AT's core values created a dramatic schism between the two. To further the problem, Avery accused MacKaye of being an armchair philosopher who did not understand the labor involved to construct the trail.[6] Nevertheless, this unsettling series of diatribes only served to reinforce MacKaye's wilderness vision as the AT's *raison*

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[5] Skyline Drive is a 169 km (105 mile) road that runs the entire length of the Shenandoah National Park in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, generally along the ridge of the mountains.

[6] Avery, M. Personal communication to B. MacKaye, September 10, 1934. (Available from National Park Service, Appalachian Trail Project Office, Harpers Ferry, WV).

d'être. In his essay, *Why the Appalachain Trail*, MacKaye (1935) emphasized his

precise conception for the trail:

> One function of true wilderness is to provide a refuge from the crassitudes of
>
> civilization – whether visible, tangible, audible – whether of billboard, of
>
> pavement, of auto-horn. Wilderness in this sense is the absence of all three.
>
> Just so of the wilderness footpath; it is unadorned; it is foot-made; it is noise-
>
> proof. Such are its qualities in essence. The advertising sign (whether board or
>
> edifice), the graded way (known as "Grade A"), the auto-horn (or its refrain
>
> the radio) – all of these are urban essences; all are negations of wilderness. No
>
> true Appalachian Trail can follow within the influences on any of these
>
> invasions, for the *Appalachian Trail is a wilderness trail or it is nothing*. Such
>
> is the original, and never abandoned, conception of the thing which the
>
> Appalachian Trail Conference was founded to preserve. (p. 7, italics added)

While Avery would have vigorously disagreed with this assertion, they both appeared

to concur about the importance of representing a wilderness experience to the public.

MacKaye "sought to insure…the hiker with a feeling of traveling in a 'wilderness'

setting" (Lowrey, 1981, p. 88) and Avery, while noting that "'wilderness' is

comparative…to the urban dweller of the East, a Trail along the 'mountain ranges of

the East was through a 'wilderness'".[7] In short, that this pervasive notion of

wilderness on the AT included both a romantic ideal and an opportunity for a

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[7] Avery, M. Personal communication to B. MacKaye, December 19, 1935. (Available from National
Park Service, Appalachian Trail Project Office, Harpers Ferry, WV).

recreational experience (Sutter, 1999) is seminal to the continuing ideology of

wilderness experiences. To be sure, in that same year (1935), MacKaye's ideals

helped found the Wilderness Society, a group dedicated to preserving the essence of

wilderness (i.e., that roads and wilderness are antithetical, etc), and whose leadership

was vital to the passage of the Wilderness Act three decades later.

By the time Earl Shaffer completed the first recorded thru-hike[8] of the

Appalachian Trail in 1948, the ideological status of the AT as representing a

wilderness experience was well established. Less than a year later, *National

Geographic* ushered in a new era of popularizing wilderness experiences with a 33-

page, full-color feature story on Shaffer's adventure describing how the "Trail ties

together long stretches of utter wilderness" (Brown & Sisson, 1949, p. 219).

Accentuating the trail experience, numerous other publications followed including

The Appalachian Trail: Wilderness on the Doorstep (Sutton & Sutton, 1967), *Sojourn

in the Wilderness: A Seven Month Journey on the Appalachian Trail* (Wadness,

1997), and *We're Off to See the Wilderness, the Wonderful Wilderness of Awes*

(Hughes, 2006). Epitomizing this representation of wilderness, a bronze plaque atop

Springer Mountain greets hikers upon their arrival to the southern terminus with, "A

footpath for those who seek fellowship with the wilderness". These representations

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[8] To clarify, Myron Avery would meet the ATC's criteria as the first 2000-miler, having covered all
2000+ miles of the trail by 1936 but Earl Shafer was the first to hike the entire trail in one season
thereby becoming the first thru-hiker. See http://www.appalachiantrail.org/noteworthy2000milers and
Holmes (1975).

and many more have certainly influenced experiences to the extent of colonizing a wide array of hikers' experiential phenomena. To be sure, just as there are hundreds of thru-hikers who have hiked the AT, there are hundreds of different AT experiences yet many experiences continue to be colonized by a wilderness ideology. This does not preclude different experiences from existing but the main characteristics that wilderness experiences offer, as put forth by past (i.e., Thoreau, MacKaye) and current authors (cf. Havlick, 2006; Oreskes, 2006; Pohl, 2006), represents a connected and flourishing ideology.

In perhaps the only study of its kind, Kendra and Hall (2000) find compelling evidence for the existence of a wilderness ideology derived from the received idea of wilderness and, that popular notions of wilderness "are equally central to those who profess to know nothing about federal wilderness as those who profess to know a lot…suggest[s] a widespread core ideal of wilderness" (p. 194). This suggestion provides a hopeful prospect for this study. However, just as there is much research that simply affirms the wilderness ideology as a postulate for outdoor experiences so too is there a paucity of research that unearths the vicissitudes of experience as a concept itself. In moving toward a decolonized understanding of the thru-hiker experience, not only do we need to decolonize experience from the wilderness ideology but also the concept of experience thereby exposing it's rich and variegated nuances. To this end, I start with a review of approaches to understanding outdoor

recreation experiences, the implications of that project and then attempt to delineate a new endeavor.

2.5 OUTDOOR RECREATION EXPERIENCES

2.5.1 Colonized Recreation Experiences

When studying recreation experiences, what underlies is a researcher's conceptualization of leisure itself. A researcher's conceptualization of leisure is fundamental to operationalizing notions of experience, not unlike "different methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation reveal different, but related, pieces to the overall picture that represents 'leisure'" (Parr and Lashua, 2004 p. 4). Indeed, leisure has been conceptualized as consumption (cf. Mullet, 1988; Kelly, 1996), participatory democracy (cf. Stormann, 1993; Hemingway, 1996), emancipatory action (cf. Hemingway, 1999), civility (cf. Sylvester, 1995), and community development (cf. Reid and van Druenen, 1996; Arai and Pedlar, 1997). In addition, popular conceptions of leisure usually include activities or states of mind, with the former representing objective, and the latter representing subjective, phenomena (Mannell and Kleiber, 1997). Howe and Rancourt (1990) sought to privilege the subjective view over the objective offering leisure experience as "the personal, subjective experiencing of leisure" (p. 400). This decidedly social-psychological perspective of leisure, however dominant, has been recognized by some researchers as neglecting the aforementioned alternative conceptions of leisure rooted in social and cultural contexts (cf. Aria and Pedlar, 1997; Hemingway and Parr, 2000).

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Nevertheless, Mannell (1999) suggests that within this perspective, leisure is best understood from the subjective view of the participant and posits three approaches: the definitional approach, the post-hoc satisfaction approach, and the immediate conscious experience approach. For Mannell and Iso-Ahola (1987) each approach would ask the following questions, respectively:

What are the factors that cause the stream of conscious experience to be broken into "chunks" and in turn, labeled as leisure and nonleisure by the individual? (p.318)

In retrospect, what needs were met and consequently how satisfying was the recreational engagement? (p.322)

What is the actual content of the experience accompanying leisure behavior and what are the factors within the individual and the immediate environment that influence these? (p.325)

Definitional studies (cf. Shaw, 1985) provided a more effective approach to understanding the quantity and quality of leisure types. Post-hoc satisfaction studies (cf. Tinsley, Barret, and Kass, 1977) attracted a great deal of attention for their potential as indicators of beneficial outcomes such as overall well-being.

However, perhaps the most beneficial subjective approach to the study of human experiences in natural environments was the immediate conscious experience, attempting to focus on what participants think about, and how they feel while engaged in outdoor recreation (cf. Cole, 2004). Under this rubric significant study

was devoted, evident in earlier works such as Clawson and Knetsch (1966), Hammitt (1980) and Hull, Stewart and Yi (1992) and culminating in the *Journal of Leisure Research's* (JLR) 1998 special issue: leisure as multiphase experiences. Stewart (1998) summarized the various conceptualizations of each author and suggested, "'Leisure' or 'leisure experiences' are widely used terms whose meanings cover a wide-breadth of mentalistic states" (p. 392). In the ensuing studies, the emergent, multiphasic nature of human experiences in outdoor recreation was evoked through conceptions such as: perceptions of risk and competence (McIntyre and Roggenbuck, 1998); constructions of experiential meanings (Patterson, Watson, Williams, and Roggenbuck, 1998); absorption-in-the-moment (Walker, Hull, and Roggenbuck, 1998); satisfaction (Hultzman, 1998); and information use (Vogt and Stewart, 1998). Others have described the experiential engagement as: peak experience (Maslow, 1962); flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975); topophilia (Tuan, 1976); a purposeful exploration of experience and creative expression (Mitchell, 1983); fascination, (Kaplan and Talbot, 1983); spirituality (Stringer and McAvoy, 1992), numinous (Raffan, 1993); personal growth, self-renewal, communitas, and harmony with nature (Arnould and Price, 1993); and oneness (Borrie and Roggenbuck, 2001). In light of this vast array, Loeffler (2004) suggested that outdoor experiential meanings are both varied and interrelated offering a deep connectivity to others (human and nonhuman), the spiritual realm, and to self.

This kind of experiential pluralism is often embraced by leisure and recreation scholars, but is antithetical to the empirical absolutism historically reflected in many research programs. Subsequently, what we know about experiential recreation is due largely because of the manner in which we approach our research (Weissinger, 1990; Patterson and Williams, 1998). Every methodology must logically presuppose an epistemology which must presuppose ontology. Therefore, it becomes increasingly important to understand the philosophical assumptions and paradigmatic beliefs that underpin scholarship and strive to make these assumptions explicit. Indeed, several years ago these issues "could have focused solely on research techniques; today leisure scholars believe that the methods they use are invariably intertwined with the questions they ask and the answers they are willing to accept" (Samdahl, 1999, p.119).

Consequently, the dominant positivistic orientation is evident in outdoor experiential literature; so much so that for many of the formative years of the field, one could metaphorically refer to interpretive research as an 'endangered species'. Indeed, the seeds of colonizing experiential recreation have long been planted and are firmly rooted in the field. The abundance of studies representing this orientation is illustrated in analyses that operationalize a subjective, social-psychological perspective of leisure which is uniquely predicated on explicating discrete variables that can be subjugated to attitudinal scales and other psychometric testing and therefore serves as a prime postulate for positivistic recreation experience research.

This outcome-oriented project, as characterized in Knudson's (1984) classic text, is concerned with the benefits of recreation experiences and "is unavoidably connected to the pursuit of happiness" (p. 25).

Perhaps most influential in the reproduction of the positivistic orientation is the idea that we can engineer experiences and therefore produce recreation in a manner that controls activities and manipulates settings to deliver the desired experiential outcomes. Of course, this notion is predicated on there being an objective reality that researchers and managers can 'capture', systematize, formulate, package, market, and deliver to the recreation consumer. Arguably one of the most accepted in this project is the recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS) (Driver, Brown, Stankey, and Gregoire, 1987), which is part of the Benefits Approach to Leisure (BAL) as an example of providing a system to identify, classify, and inventory settings capable of generating experiential outcomes for recreationists. The underlying assumption of the ROS and BAL is that people choose a particular activity in a particular setting to achieve particular types of experiences that are preferred (Virden and Knopf, 1989). Although originally conceived to guide management (ROS under the Benefits Based Management (BBM) rubric), the BAL is being used by academics to guide leisure research "to integrate and to direct thinking about the management of leisure and recreation service delivery systems" (Driver and Bruns, 1999, p. 349).

For these researchers, the focus has been on the relationship between setting attributes (environmental, social, and managerial) and recreational experience outcomes such as satisfaction (cf. Ewert and Hollenhorst, 1994; Graefe and Fedler, 1986; Peterson, 1974; Tarrant, Cordell, and Kibler, 1997). Delivering satisfaction has also long been a promise of positivism. For Comte (1798-1857) (cited in Peca, 1986), the ultimate goal of the scientific project was to uncover the established laws of nature thereby allowing control and prediction of society's behavior in order to improve humankind. In this way, researchers have sought to improve the condition of recreational experiences by controlling social attributes (i.e., Carothers, Vaske, and Donnelly, 2001; Confer, Thapa, and Mendelson, 2005; Manfredo, Vaske, and Teel, 2003; & Ramthun, 1995) and manipulating setting or environmental attributes (i.e., Lynn and Brown, 2003; Shelby and Harris, 1985). While environmental and social attributes warrant scientific investigation, many conventional research programs have sought to explicate the individual outcomes of outdoor experiences, most notably through "those situational effects that are subject to managerial influence" (Stewart & Cole, 1999, p. 269). The carrying capacity literature embodies this approach as it seeks to identify the exact density of people in applying norms for setting standards of quality to recreation experiences (cf. Manning, Lawson, Newman, Laven, and Valliere, 2002; Manning, Valliere, Minteer, Wang, and Jacobi, 2000; Vaske, Graefe, Shelby, and Heberlein, 1986).

In similar fashion, many other researchers have published experiential outcome-oriented work categorized by Driver and Bruns' (1999) as recreation experience opportunities. Examples include: adventure (Ewert and Hollenhorst, 1989; Priest, 1992), fundamental and transient emotions (Lee and Shafer, 2002), landscape appreciation (Chhetri, Arrowsmith, and Jackson, 2004; Hull and Stewart, 1995; Shafer, Hamilton, and Schmidt, 1969), place attachment (Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2003; Kyle, Graefe, & Manning, 2004), restorative effects (Hartig, Mang, & Evans, 1991), challenge and risk (Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993; Ewert, 1994; Schuett, 1993), self-actualization (Ewert, 1988), and solitude (Stewart & Carpenter, 1989). These studies attempt to isolate experiential features for investigation in order to provide managers with the 'key ingredients' in delivering recreational experiences. This approach, though useful in the identification of specific experiences, most notably fails to describe or explain the vicissitudes of discursive and dialectical experiences.

By focusing on the degree to which desired and expected outcomes of an experience are realized, this approach neglects the changing nature of a recreation experience. The 1998 special issue of JLR was the first concentrated effort in the field of outdoor recreation to understand recreation experiences apart from conventional conceptualizations. In his introduction, Stewart (1998) challenges researchers to discard "the still life photograph depiction" (p. 392) of experiencing one's environment. In contrast, these studies were to examine the emergent,

dynamic, and hence, multiphasic nature of an experience. Yet, with the exception of Patterson's, et al. (1998) hermeneutic method, each study conforms to, at best; a post-positivistic approach and the limited and disappointing results are reflected in the corresponding discussions and/or conclusions. For example, McIntyre and Roggenbuck (1998) initially state, "If we are to understand leisure experiences fully, we need to also focus on participants' immediate conscious experience" (p. 403) then atavistically draw upon the positivistic archetype (e.g., Wapner, Cohen, & Kaplan, 1976) by choosing *a priori* the dimensions to investigate. Although the study findings additionally offer some short but rich narrative descriptions they are used to 'confirm and support' previously held views resulting in a study that represents a multi-method approach more than a multiphase analysis. This same kind of limited result is also seen more recently, in the paper by Goldenburg, Klenosky, O'Leary, and Templin (2000). The authors embark to "learn more about the role and meaning of the benefits associated" (p. 209) with ropes course experiences. However, by changing the data-gathering technique (e.g., laddering) from qualitative interviews to quantitative questionnaires, in order to coalesce with deductive rationales, meanings were never garnered in the project. The change in research directives is explicit, "this research is…to specifically investigate the benefits and outcomes of engaging in or experiencing a recreation activity" and instead of acknowledging their misguidance, Goldenburg et al. (2000) suggest "future research should be conducted either to explore the benefits of other specific recreation activities or experiences or to help

enrich our understanding of the benefits of recreation at a more macro or societal level" (p. 222).

The appeal for research to understand phenomena at a macro level represents the underlying notion of causal laws in generalizing research findings. Hull, Michael, Walker, and Roggenbuck (1996) suggest the intuitive 'ebb and flow' of recreation experiences however, the authors are left with puzzling questions because the conventional approach never seems to elucidate the 'ebb and flow'. Instead, Hull et al. (1996) discuss how to capture the "aggregate or summarize an experience pattern" (p. 312). More specifically, Stewart and Cole (1999, 2001) assert the conventional rationale to management applications, such as setting use limits, rests on a weak empirical foundation comprised of nonsignificant or inconsequential results. Moreover, they propose that situational effects may be "substantial but traditional research methods are poorly suited to examine them" (Stewart and Cole, 1999, p. 270) and suggest that qualitative approaches are more pertinent. I suggest that conventional research has co-opted experiential features and situational effects, such as crowding and solitude, within the experiential quality and normative research frameworks and hence, colonized experiential recreation into these narrow constraints.

2.5.2 Decolonizing Recreation Experiences

Decolonizing recreation experiences necessitates an acknowledgement of dominant discourses. Similar to how I have attempted to decolonize the ideology of

wilderness through exposing the dominant representation of nature and wilderness, leisure scholars are beginning to expose dominant discourses where previous understandings of recreation experiences "were almost exclusively based on the experiences of white men" (Little & Wilson, 2005, p. 186). Perspectives that have arguably served outdoor recreation scholarship the most, in critically examining experiences thereby allowing alternative experiences to be heard, include feminist (cf. Ball, 1986; Henderson, 1992; McDiarmid, 1995; Zwinger & Zwinger, 1995) and multi-cultural heritage (cf. Burnett & wa Kang'ethe, 1994; Smith, 2005) research. Moreover, in recognizing the influence scientific paradigms can have on research, the vast majority of these projects involve not only a refreshing theoretical perspective but an interpretive approach to the research.

Interpretive inquiry inherently deals with the human lived-experience and hence, has an intuitive appeal for studying the process of experience versus causal relationships and outcomes. Indeed, Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) find that:

> Process-sensitive scholars watch the world flow by like a river in which the exact contents of the water are never the same. Because all observers view an object of inquiry from their own vantage points in the web of reality, no portrait of a social phenomenon is exactly the same as another. (p. 319)

Different perspectives of recreational experience are not viewed as problematic since there are no better or preferred views, just different views. In the empirical literature, outdoor experiences were studied minimally from this perspective. Perhaps the study

most often thought of is Arnould and Price's (1993) examination of river rafting experiences. In their research, they questioned the relationship of expectations or desired outcomes and actual outcomes for satisfaction preferring the notion of 'extraordinary experience' where "satisfaction is embodied in the success of the narrative" (p. 25). This conceptualization allows for several different meanings of satisfaction according to the participants' stories of extraordinary experience including personal growth and self-renewal, communitas, and harmony with nature. Moreover, Arnould and Price (1993) differentiated 'extraordinary experience' from 'flow' or 'peak performances' to include social relationships and low levels of physical effort. The impact of their study is immense and remains a commonly cited work influencing most experiential recreation studies today. However, Arnould and Price (1993) are, and were at the time of publication, business marketing researchers and their concept of 'extraordinary experience' is couched in an idyllic hedonic consumption approach. While the commercial outdoor adventure industry is noteworthy and provides valuable insights to experiential recreation, many recent projects followed Arnould and Price's focus on the commercial enterprise, ignoring many other nuances of outdoor experience. For example, Beedie (2003) discusses experience according to the physical and social 'frame' that provide the commercial mountain guide opportunities to 'choreograph' participants' experiences. Similarly, Sharpe (2005a) examines the emotional experiences of commercial adventure guides' enacted persona and Sharpe (2005b) expands this concept to a commercial adventure

provider delivering communitas as part of an outdoor experience package. As a slight departure, Jonas, Stewart, and Larkin (2003) examine the positive effects of backcountry encounters on experience, albeit the numbers of encounters, which provide the authenticity of experience, would be significantly diminished without a commercial delivery structure. Nevertheless, all of these studies employ an interpretive methodology to elicit extremely rich accounts of participants' process (es) of experiencing outdoor recreation. In addition to these, Patterson et al. (1998) employ hermeneutics to investigate the dynamic, emergent, and multiphasic process of experiences "motivated by the not very well-defined, precise, or specified goal of acquiring stories that ultimately enrich our lives" (p. 450). They found that participant stories, or more precisely the reflecting and sharing of those stories, is an important mode of how people relate to their recreation experiences:

> Rather than seeking explanations for why recreationists are satisfied when expectations are not met, this situation is not viewed as problematic from this model and therefore research proceeds down other avenues. For example…Good stories come from negative events which are overcome as well as from purely positive experiences, regardless of any underlying expectations. (Patterson et al., 1998, p. 449)

This seminal discernment predicts Kelly's (2000) call for leisure as 'ordinary life', and serves as a touchstone for my research. However, before I explain my approach and how it builds on the current literature, I must mention two other studies.

From my reading of the empirical literature, I find few papers that signal a move of the field in this direction, that is, to understand empirically, by connecting theoretical concepts and lived praxis, how people's experiential recreation contributes to the broader ecological context (s) of their lives. By myopically focusing on both the positive outcomes and/or processes in experience we denigrate or completely neglect the experiences that are not 'peak experiences' that have remarkable impact on how we live in connection to society and the nonhuman environment. Two recent papers offer a refreshing perspective of outdoor recreation experiences. Loeffler (2004) inductively employs a photo-elicitation technique to understand outdoor experiences and posits that connections to self, others and the environment form the foundation of outdoor experience. For her, the pertinent questions are "how or why these critical elements function in this way" (Loeffler, 2004, p. 551), "what goes unphotographed in the outdoor experience" and "what moments get lost from memory because they don't fit the master narrative of the glorious outdoor experience" (p. 553)? In similar fashion, Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai (2002) conduct in-depth interviews (although they invoke Cohen's (1979) phenomenology of tourist types) to examine how backpackers relate at various times to numerous types of experiences and how variability could occur within a single trip or during a 'backpacking biography' (lifetime). In short, backpackers (i.e., AT hikers) can have discursive experiences. Indeed, the vicissitudes of experience inherently leads to variegate experiences, even throughout a single backpacking journey. Combined with recent understandings of

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how recreation and tourism are becoming less spatially and temporally separated (Pomfret, 2006), this insight provides hope for fecundity of thought in outdoor experiential recreation research. For example, in experiential recreation projects, researchers would not simply uphold the contemporary ideology of a wilderness experience as a postulate, preferring instead to deconstruct hegemonic views. As Loeffler (2004) questions the 'glorious outdoor experience', and as Uriely et al. (2000) explicate the potential for a wide array of experiences, this study is positioned to question the same concepts among AT thru-hikers. However, my work also intends to inform the understanding of experience as a concept but before I discuss the main theoretical underpinnings for this study, I will outline my own paradigmatic assumptions.

2.6 A DIFFERENT EXPERIENTIAL PROJECT

2.6.1 Paradigmatic Assumptions

Human understanding of social and ecological phenomena is neither veritable nor relativistic but involves paradigmatic assumptions comprised of axiological, ontological, epistemological, and methodological constructions. As such, we can see how research strategies are informed by a researcher's paradigmatic cohorts. However, as a *caveat*, established and emergent paradigms are experiencing the constant interweaving and borrowing, or *bricolage*, of multiple perspectives (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) similar to Geertz's (1993) prophecy of blurring genres. Very few

researchers can situate themselves securely within a single, established paradigm without the border of his/her paradigm shifting to some extent.

Until recently, Guba and Lincoln (1994) had reserved axiology as a subject ancillary to basic paradigmatic beliefs. However, reflecting on their previous rationale:

> If we had it to do all over again, we would make values, or more correctly, axiology a part of the basic foundational philosophical dimensions of paradigm proposal. To do so would…help us see the embeddedness of ethics within, not external to, paradigms. (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 200)

More specifically related to the issues of research, Sterling (1990) argues that "the classical disjunction between subject and object, fact and value, is invalid; the knower is implicated in the known…." (p.80). Just as the manner in which I select, investigate, and interpret phenomena depends upon my values, so too is the paradigm that directs my research program. As a result, this research sets out to examine recreational experiences broadly conceived from a critical, interpretive perspective. Embracing the study of outdoor experiences and the knowledge thereof that is embedded, embodied, and sometimes tacit essentially comprises a counterhegemonic standpoint. However, I suggest this project is central to understanding the complexity of outdoor experiences that indeed are emergent, dynamic, and multiphasic. The methodology I prefer to engage in this project requires drawing upon multiple epistemologies and a critical realist ontology framed as a broad philosophical

paradigm that comprises both transformative and emancipatory principles (cf.

Denzin, 1997) to the current research project.

Dialectical critical realism (cf. Coole, 2005), for our purposes in this study, rejects the naturalistic fallacy of nature as Origin (Vogel, 1998). When deconstructed, the naïve realist origin of wilderness in nature is always deferred (Derrida, 1982) because one cannot escape the human footprint, so much so, that the wilderness concept begins to appear anachronistic in ecocentric terms. Indeed, only recently have recreation researchers begun to acknowledge aboriginal influences on the environment (Cole, 2001) and recognizing indigenes as part of culture instead of part of nature. As a result, there is no *deep* ontological difference between cities and national parks,[9] as though one represents human change while the other represents that timeless Origin away from change. Nonetheless, to the extent the critical stance invokes emanicipatory ideals; there must be an external reality to aid. Just as the phenomenologist can "never translate this lived dialectic into concepts or represent it theoretically without remainder," the critical realist senses there is a search, however inexhaustible, for deeper levels and dimensions of the real (Coole, 2005, p. 124). In short, the existence of an imponderable external reality does not preclude one from attempting to understand the phenomenal realm of existence, where perception and embodiment are equally *prima facie*. The result would be what Bhaskar (1978) calls the 'epistemic fallacy'. This perspective is fundamental to my view that the human

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[9] I want to reinforce this point as a metaphysical distinction. The two do indeed appear extremely different for all intents and purposes of the 'natural attitude'.

mind can function independent of nature that is outside of it and requires belief in

something that cannot be fully and objectively understood, while the body-subject is

fully part of nature. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's (1962) 'embodied-dialectic' appeals to

"being connatural with the world, to discover a sense in certain aspects of being

without having myself endowed them with it through any constituting operation" (p.

217) thereby allowing both materiality and meaning. The consequences of this

ontological foundation are two fold: first, the reality that the mind creates for us when

we explore the world is not necessarily an objective or realist reflection of nature, and

secondly, the functions of the mind construct for us reality-as-we-know-it. This is

true for physical reality as well as for the construction of the social world we inhabit.

Moreover, the critical realist approach to nature allows movement beyond the naïve

realism/fully constructed divide. I argue that both fully objective and subjective

views miss the mark in experiential understanding. The realist view, while

recognizing the pre-perceptual, pre-constructed experience, reduces it to fully

observable, explainable causal laws thereby denying the meaning of experience and

dichotomizing nature and culture (Patomaki & Wight, 2000). On the other hand,

fully-constructed views deny pre-perceptual experiences as everything is constructed

and therefore reduced to deferred knowledge or sometimes "an impenetrable

hermeneutic circle" (Carolan, 2005, p. 411). Nevertheless, there is frequent debate

even concerning these matters.

Up to this point, I have explicitly engaged a limited use of postcolonial theory to deconstruct dominant wilderness ideologies that have infused experiential recreation research and practice. In a similar vein, much research has myopically focused on the fully reflected-on phenomenal perceptions of experience (cf. Hayllar & Griffin, 2005) thereby silencing the sensual experiences in outdoor recreation. Experience is embodied as much as it is perceived and therefore, phenomenology's orientation toward embodiment and perception, both in the telling and enactment of experience, explicates the pre-reflective experience. Giving the body 'voice' allows us to understand how the body both affects and is affected by experience and the meanings therein. There is virtually no research in outdoor recreation committed to understanding the complexity of the embodiment-perception nexus and yet many environmental theorists have pointed to phenomenology as particularly suited to explicating the nuances of experience (cf. Nash, 1989; Kohak, 1997; Brown and Toadvine, 2003; Toadvine, 2005). Consequently, I continue to suggest that the adoption of both postcolonial theory and phenomenology is an essential prolegomena to an ecocentric view of experiential recreation.

2.6.2 Dilthey and the Vicissitudes of Experience

Acknowledging the variability of experience explored in the recreation literature is becoming more common but there has been little work about the concept of experience itself. To be sure, most research on experience that challenges the assumptions of dominant discourses, however progressive; have really been about the

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diversity of experience rather than the vicissitudes of experience. By and large, recreation researchers have failed to explicate the full richness of experience in our writings and theorizing relying rather on essentialized and assumed conceptions of experience. Gadamer (2004) observed that the English term 'experience' implies a condensing or intensifying of meaning. The problematics of a unifying term like 'experience' is that it "excludes whole realms of human activities by simply not counting them as experience" (Scott, 1991, p. 785). Questioning the universality of experience, Desjarlais (1994) suggests, as a result, experiences can be cumulative and homogenizing. My contention is that 'experience' is so often taken-for-granted, the concept tends to remain largely unquestioned and hence, conceals rich and nuanced understandings of outdoor recreation experiences. Given the ubiquity of the term, it seems rather surprising this might be the case but J. W. Scott (1991), D. Scott (1992) and Desjarlais (1994, 1997) contend this problem permeates the social sciences in general. Moreover, these authors propose that the current cultural, historical and political underpinnings of the concept of experience compel researchers to no longer consider it a universal category. To the extent that I have set out to decolonize outdoor experiences, first by historicizing and exposing the ideology of wilderness, I must now place experience itself in brackets, as Desjarlais (1997) suggests, as a propaedeutic to the empirical aspect of this dissertation. It is only through this that we can better understand the limitations of past experiential recreation research and open new ways to understand experience.

Drawing from the philosophical works of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), who is most well known for his concept of *Verstehen* (understanding; cf. Schwandt, 2001) as an aim and method peculiar to the human sciences, we can explicate 'experience'. In contrast to the traditional psychology of his day, and much current recreation research, which focuses on causal explanations for the structuring of experience, Dilthey's 'descriptive psychology' held that "causal connections between psychical, social, and physical phenomena cannot be established before there is an adequate description of subjective experience" (Throop, 2002, p. 4). This view was underpinned by Dilthey's insistence in the fundamental differences between the natural and human sciences and that human scientists were simply using models and methods from the natural sciences which were unsuitable for examining not just experience but a particular kind of experience. At the basis of this distinction lay two basic modes of experiencing reality: inner lived experience (*Erlebnis*) and outer sensory experience (*Erfahrung*). Whereas for Dilthey, the human sciences are based upon an immediate apprehension of lived experience and constantly refer to it, the natural sciences build their causal laws from abstractions based upon sensory experience. The terms Dilthey used has led to widespread ambiguity and some confusion. Where outer sensory experience is meant for the physical processes and objects of Nature as a scientific construct known only through external senses and worked into an order of laws, lived experience is not limited to 'inner' experience as a solipsistic account but, as Makkreel (1992) points out, also, "involves our attitude to,

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and thus awareness of, external reality" (p. 148). From this, outer sensory experience

is merely the starting point for a process of abstraction, reduction, and formalization

in order to derive a deductive hypothesis. Moreover, in contrast to Kantian views of a

conceptually constructed pattern of sensation, Dilthey argued for a primordially

'given' experience to consciousness. Hence, *Erlebnis* is a lived-through, immediate

experience while *Erfahrung* is characterized by objectiveness, articulation, repetition,

and general acknowledgement (Dilthey, 1976).

Since *Erlebnis* is what Dilthey contends is at the heart of the human sciences,

it is of little surprise that he spent considerable time explicating lived experience and

hence, delineated seven different modes of lived experience (see Figure 2). Csordas

(1990) remarks that the postulation of a continuum of experience that ranges from

pre-reflective to reflective modes accentuates the necessity for recognizing the

significant insight our perceptual processes do not begin with, but instead end in the

objects and qualities inherent in experience. *Erleben*, the verb form of *Erlebnis* is the

first of these seven modes. This is a pre-predicative, pre-reflective experiencing and

is the "most rudimentary level of experience prior to the analytical separation of

subject and object, self and world, form and content, inner and outer" (Ermarth, 1981,

p. 130). Gadamer (2004) suggests this verb form of lived experience indicates the

immediacy of the initial 'giveness' in experience that simply *is* and has yet to be

shaped by reflection.
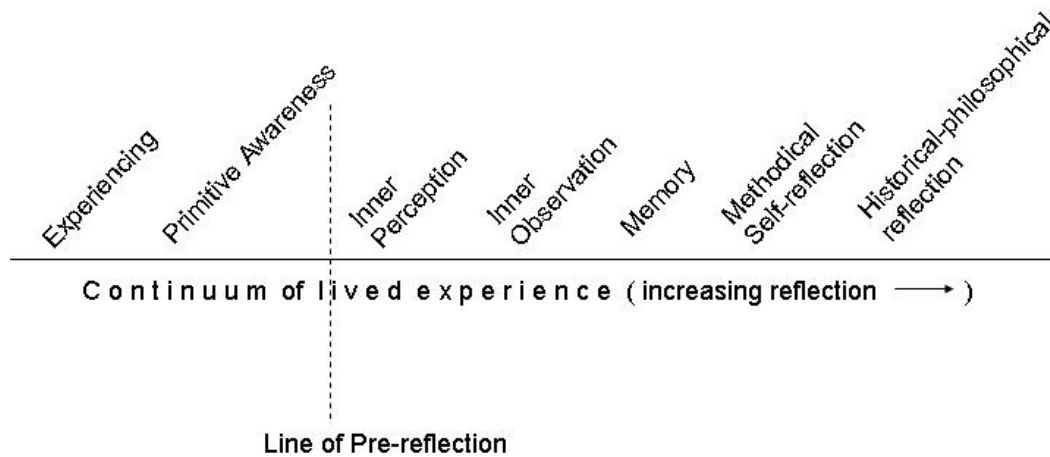
Figure 2. **Dilthey's Seven Modes of Lived Experience (Erlebnis)**

Second, *Innewerden* is a primitive awareness of experience that Dilthey (1989) describes as "an immediate prereflective mode of self-giveness in which the dichotomies of form and content, subject and object characteristic of reflective consciousness do not yet exist" (p. 247). Where *Erleben* is the simple having of experience, *Innewerden* is the intimate mode in which *Erleben* is appropriated (Makkreel, 1992). Both of these modes occupy a pre-reflective consciousness and do not objectify the 'given' but *Innewerden* posits primordial acts of a "typifying awareness" (Ermarth, 1981, p. 131). Building on this awareness, Ermarth (1981) distinguishes the third mode, *innere Wahrnehmung*, as inner perception that attains a

"stabilizing in attention" (p. 131) thereby providing the empirical content of what is given without changing the form of the given. Moving from *innere Wahrnehmung* to *innere Beobachtung* or inner observation, Dilthey (1989) asserts that inner relations of experience become fixed as isolated features of deliberate attention. While Dilthey believes that inner observation does not preclude an unaltered sense of experience this 'fixing' usually "results in the modification of the observed features of consciousness since these features must necessarily be abstracted from the pre-reflective flow of lived experience" (Throop, 2002, p. 8). The final three modes of lived experience, *Erinnerung*, *Selbstbesinnung*, and *historische Besinnung*, respectively, are characterized as moving progressively towards more refined modes of reflection. *Erinnerung*, or consciousness as memory is delineated from deliberate or practiced memory and serves to provide a meaningful coherence to experience yet is "subject to the inevitably modifying influence of supervening experiences and even expectation of the future" (Ermarth, 1981, p. 131). Methodical self-reflection, *Selbstbesinnung*, lucidly connects relations among the more primordial contents of experience with regard to the consciousness of others' self-consciousness while *historische Besinnung* (sometimes *anthropologische Besinnung*) is a historical-philosophical reflection that contextualizes the contents of experience in an accumulating pattern of history and culture (Ermarth, 1981; Throop, 2002).

Each mode of this fine-grained continuum juxtaposes each mode of experience to the next as both reflective to the preceding and immediately

foundational to the succeeding, presenting a conjunctive flow to seemingly disjunctive modes. Nevertheless, although we can elucidate specific yet partial contents of experience for scientific explication, Dilthey (1976) was careful in stipulating that the actual flow of experience, as a temporal succession, cannot be experienced:

> The antinomies which thought discovers in the experience of time spring form its cognitive impenetrability. Even the smallest part of temporal progress involves the passing of time. There never *is* a present; what we experience as present always contains memory of what has just been present. In other cases the past has a direct affect on, and meaning for, the present and this gives to memories a peculiar character of being present through which they become included in the present. Whatever presents itself as a unit in the flow of time because it has a unitary meaning, is the smallest unit which can be called *an experience*. Any more comprehensive unit which is made up of parts of a life, linked by common meaning is also called *an experience*, even where the parts are separated by interrupting events. (p. 210)

What Dilthey is casually referring to as *an experience*, Turner (1985, 1986) takes as a main point of departure in understanding not only the flow of experience but how this flow is structured. Reinforcing this concept, Turner (1985) explains that while *Erlebnis*, as comprised of these seven modes, is "inherently structural, not a flow of ephemeral moments" (p. 212) and yet it can have a "somewhat indeterminate, flow of

succession" (Throop, 2003, p. 224). Turner (1986) elucidates this distinction with his use of 'mere experience' and 'an experience'. For Turner:

> Mere experience is simply the passive endurance and acceptance of events. *An* experience, like a rock in a Zen sand garden, stands out from the evenness of passing hours and years and forms what Dilthey called a 'structure of experience'. In other words, it does not have an *arbitrary* beginning and ending, cut out of the stream of chronological termporality, but has what Dewey called 'an initiation and a consummation'. (p. 35, emphasis in original)

However, in his reading of Dilthey, Turner (1982) suggests meaning is a cognitive structure oriented to the past, value is an affective structure tied to the vicissitudes of the present moment, and ends are volitional structures tied to goal-directed behavior. Moreover, the apparent ambiguity in meaningfulness, for Turner, between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* lies within typicality. Typicality refers to "the recognition even while something is taking place in one's own life that it is a replaying, in some dimension, of things that have happened to others" (Abrahams, 1986, p. 60). This capacity allows an individual to recognize when something is becoming '*an* experience' and hence, the more or less it is ordinary. The problem with this reading is that Turner appears to be content not only with meanings that are fully reflective and hence mediated but he also tends to subjugate *Erlebnis* itself simply as an expression of culture. Indeed, as an anthropologist, Turner (1985) notes that '*an* experience' has an intersubjectively accessible form, what Dilthey (1989) called 'objectified mind', and

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this form is highly influenced by culture. Furthermore, Turner (1982), developing his own five 'moments of experience' from his reading of Dilthey, suggests it is only really in the fifth moment – the expression of experience as the objectification of experience – that *Erlebnis* reveals itself to consciousness. To be fair, yet without reverting to some form of environmental determinism, we must also recognize the external, intersubjective, and culturally symbolic aspects of experience. Desjarlais (1997) suggests "what we take as 'experience' and 'agency' are born of a gamut of cultural, political, biological, linguistic, and environmental factors" (p. 24).

Nonetheless, Gadamer (2004; cf. Arthos, 2000) suggests something becomes 'an experience' "not only insofar as it is experienced, but insofar as its being experienced makes a special impression that gives it lasting importance" (p. 61). Here it is that we can see the importance of the flow of experience including pre-reflective experience that Turner seems to miss. Indeed, Dewey (1934/1980) observes all "experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creatures and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living…Oftentimes the experience had is inchoate…things are experienced but not in any way that they are composed into *an* experience" (p. 35). Defying simplistic categorization, these apparent antimonies are crucial to understanding the discursive and dialectical essence of the concept of experience. Returning for a moment to outdoor recreation research, we can begin to understand why an undifferentiated working of experience produces such a limited view of outdoor experiences. Based on the Diltheyan

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framework of *Erlebnis*, I suggest that within the structure of 'an experience' increasing conscious reflection results in an increased modification of one's experience to the extent that reflection becomes influenced or modified by past experiences, future expectations, and other people's experiences expressed directly or indirectly in the form of ideological representation. It appears this is where much experiential recreation research has failed and it is unclear whether past studies have contributed to a fully reflective understanding of *Erlebnis* or simply what both Dilthey and Husserl referred to as a naïve conception of lived experience referred to as *innere Erfahrung* (Ermarth, 1981). As such, we must take a more focused and concerted examination starting with pre-reflective lived experience.

2.6.3 Philosophical Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is widely acknowledged as the father of phenomenology who upon the publication of his *Logical Investigations* in 1900 arguably initiated a major turning point in philosophy and science. Indeed, this publication was the single most important influence on Dilthey at the time (Ermarth, 1981; Tillman, 1976). And while Dilthey was strongly rooted as a hermeneutic philosopher in his own right, some of his work reflects this influence by incorporating some phenomenological concepts. Much like Dilthey, Husserl spent a significant part of his career attempting to attain a better understanding of experience but he focused much more on pre-reflective experience. The two scholars exchanged letters and met often during their lives but they also notably diverged on several issues. The most

seminal divergent matter between them is while Dilthey saw the utility in phenomenology as an analytical tool for his human sciences; Husserl treated phenomenology as epistemology (Makkreel, 1992). Moreover, while both viewed *Erlebnis* as the mode of experience for scientific explication, Husserl tends to compress Dilthey's seven distinct modes of *Erlebnis* and instead renders it as a single mode of lived experience (cf. Husserl, 1970; Kockelmans, 1967). Conceivably, Husserl was so disillusioned and discontented with the naturalism of his day that a phenomenology which specifically sought a pre-reflective mode of experience was seen as the antipode to traditional research. Indeed, it would take only a cursory reading of the literature to see this is how *Erlebnis* is treated in most phenomenological studies today. Hence, to better understand this treatment of *Erlebnis* requires prescinding briefly into some key concepts in Husserl's phenomenology and thus outlining my theoretical path to understanding outdoor experiences.

Husserl was interested with the discovery of meanings and essences in knowledge. A seminal concept is the distinction between essences and facts, or particulars, because essences are often obscured by facts and the natural attitude (Moustakas, 1994). Hence, '*Zu den Sachen selbst'*, to the things themselves, was Husserl's philosophical dictum and phenomenologically expresses the underlying approach to understanding lived experience. Lived experience, here, is central to the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) perspective that Husserl conceived yet is only implicit in

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many of his writings (cf. Husserl, 1948, 1970). The most basic concept in phenomenology is that by returning to phenomena[10] (objects) as they are experienced by a subject (pre-reflectively) researchers are better able to distinguish between the *objects* and *acts* of consciousness and hence, reveal the essence of a phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). This distinction changes the reductive impetus of causal connections between outer objects and inner mind by the doctrine of intentionality. Building on the eminent psychologist Franz Brentano's concept of intentionality, consciousness became intimately involved in experience. Intentionality refers to the intentional nature of consciousness, that is, consciousness is always consciousness of something and, for Husserl, is comprised of a *noema* (textural) and *noesis* (structural) (Kockelmans, 1994). In considering the *noema-noesis* correlate, Moustakas (1994) suggests that in each experience "[f]or every *noema* there is a *noesis*; for every *noesis* there is a *noema*" (p. 30). Subsequently, to the extent that conscious experience is foremost an awareness of intentional meaning comprised of a relationship between texture and structure, experience is delivered from the ambiguity of the natural attitude. Indeed, intentionality allows our experiences to be infused with meaning because "one thinks *in* the meanings instead of *about* them" (Husserl, 1970, p. 152, emphasis added). In short, when we experience something, it is experienced as something which has meaning for us.

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[10] The word phenomena comes the Greek *phainesthai*, which signifies 'to show itself', or as Heidegger (1998) noted, "that which shows itself in itself" (p. 50).

Intentionality has important implications for a pre-reflective *Erlebnis*. This can be seen in the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). Much like Dilthey and Husserl, Merleau-Ponty spent much of his career outlining his concepts of pre-objective experience that were, for him, grounded in perception. However, where Husserl's version of phenomenology suffers from an overly intellectual emphasis, the imbalance is remedied by Merleau-Ponty's focus on the lived body as a body-subject. In his highly influential, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), the primacy of perception is not only at the heart of the phenomenological project, it is an embodied experience in a world, pre-reflective and unscrutinized. Likewise, Merleau-Ponty (2004) built on Husserl's *Lebenswelt* to create a lifeworld phenomenology expressed by him as "être-au-monde", being-to-the-world, where the body-proper is the locus of existence; "the world is not what I think, but what I live through" (p. xviii; cf. Zaner, 1965). As such the lifeworld refers to the pre-reflective world always already existing before reflection where the body itself is the perceiving subject. When the relationship between body and world is modified, experience becomes an intersubjective phenomenon, between human and more-than-human. For Merleau-Ponty, our body is 'our anchor in the world (sic)', not merely an object or biological thing. Insofar as we can ignore or turn away from objects, we can never turn away from our body or stand outside of our own embodiment. In addition to understanding our relationship to the world,

intersubjectivity gives us insight into the world of other people. With respect to the embodied nature of knowing others, Merleau-Ponty (1991) writes:

> [I]n a fire, only the subject who is burned can feel the sensible sharpness of pain. But everything that the burn represents: the menace of fire, the danger for the well-being of the body, the significance of the pain, can be communicated to other people and felt by other people…the intuition of the feeling is the same for the two consciousnesses. (p. 47)

To the extent that we reach others and our world through the body, intersubjectivity is, for Merleau-Ponty, intercorporeality. This perspective begins to open the Merleau-Pontian existentialism that is useful to this study. Developing Husserl's concepts of intentional consciousness, Merleau-Ponty (2004) supercedes the notion of a self-contained consciousness and suggests, "[t]ruth does not 'inhabit' only 'the inner man', or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself" (p. xii). The body-subject is also the embodied mind and signals a reworking of perception and intentionality.

Merleau-Ponty critiques Husserl's noema-noesis structure of intentionality and suggests his position on the relationship between pre-reflective intentionality and the given world is incomplete. Whereas for Husserl, intentionality presents both the noema and noesis (i.e., texture and structure or form and matter) of something, Merleau-Ponty suggests there can be intentional acts which are not about any specific object. As an illustration, Merleau-Ponty (2004) explains how love, before he was

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explicitly aware of it, was an "impulse carrying me towards someone" but it was not

"an object before my consciousness" (p. 381). It was a pre-reflective intentional act

without being intended at an object. This intentionality is what Merleau-Ponty

suggests is operative intentionality, namely, an embodied basic intentionality of the

lived world. In his *Preface* to *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (2004)

once again credits Husserl for the distinction between intentionality of act (thetic) and

operative intentionality but he also characterizes him as failing to explicate operative

intentionality, the preconditions of which are given in thetic intentionality, in a more

primordial sense. Operative intentionality is thus the body's primordial motility in

space where body-subjects are pre-reflectively directed towards the given-ness of the

world with emerging phenomena as "matter pregnant with form" (Merleau-Ponty,

2004, p. 291). In this sense, phenomena appear as meaningful wholes comprised of

both figure and background in a phenomenal field (Moran, 2000). The phenomenal

field is the place of perceptual experiences, like a horizon, where a body-subject can

perceive the world from different standpoints depending on situational existentials.

In developing this notion Merleau-Ponty utilizes and problematizes both Husserlian

phenomenology and Gestalt psychology (Dillon, 1988; Reuter, 1999). The terms

figure and background are borrowed from Gestalt psychology where the familiar

black and white design of Rubin's vase is often used, in which a focus on the white

portion reveals the vase and a focus on the black portions reveals two faces vis-à-vis

(cf. Hasson, Hendler, Bashat, & Malach, 2001). In this sense, meaning is intrinsic,

for Merleau-Ponty, to the phenomenal field as organization is intrinsic to the perceptual field for Gestalt psychologists (Reuter, 1999). Utilizing Merleau-Ponty's well-known illustration of perceiving a house, Sadala and Adorno (2002) paraphrase:

> We perceive a neighbouring house we pass by it. When we come closer, firstly we see one side, then as we walk by, we see the front of the house and next, the other side. If we went around the house, we would see its back and, if we could get in, we would see the inside from several angles according to where we were. As we have a different view from each angle and as we know that it is a house, we conclude that the house exists by itself, independently from any perspective. At the same time any view we might have from any angle whatsoever would allow us to know that it is a house. Seeing the house is therefore seeing it from somewhere, at a certain moment, i.e. seeing it in a multiperspective way, at a certain place, at a certain moment referred to as a horizon. Thus, seeing a house implies being able to see it from several perspectives, which are various possibilities. (p. 287)

As such, perceptual experience is not just perceived but is constituted by, and from, the perspective of a body-subject to the extent that a phenomenon is always partly hidden and partly revealed. Although we can never see all perspectives of a phenomenon simultaneously researchers strive for the convergence of several perspectives in explicating the essence of phenomena. As Merleau-Ponty (200) makes clear, "[t]he perceptual 'something' is always in the middle of something else,

it always forms part of a 'field'" however this is often overlooked "because instead of attending to the experience of perception, we overlook it in favor of the object perceived" (p. 4). Insofar as the primacy of perception remains as the primacy of embodied consciousness with its attendance on operative intentionality, pre-reflective existential experience is the locus for explication of the phenomenological essence. Indeed, our perceptions are organized not only by our experiences but by our embodied experiences.

Resultantly, my rationale for these last two philosophic sections is to firmly ground this dissertation in the phenomenological tradition, specifically of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, but in so doing point to the theoretical gaps that have led me to the burgeoning field of ecophenomenology. Moreover, by explicating Dilthey's expository treatment of *Erlebnis*, I suggest any project that seeks an inclusive consideration of lived experience must include the viccisitudes of experience and at the same time not reduce lived experience to only the intentionality of a pre-predicative level. Insofar as *Erlbenis* is a continuum, the virtuous researcher must treat it as such in empirical analyses.

2.6.4 Ecophenomenology and Experience

Up to this point I have gleaned from the works of early Merleau-Ponty, particularly his *Phenomenology of Perception* which is hailed as his *magnum opus*, and indeed, the work has had a profound impact on philosophy and many fields of science, and yet Merleau-Ponty, in the years preceding his untimely death, was

increasingly dissatisfied with his notion of being-to-the-world as an embodied

consciousness (Evans & Lawlor, 2000). In his unfinished and posthumously

published manuscript, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty (1969) sets out to

overcome this earlier conception and that unless one does so "[t]he problems posed in

Ph.P. are insoluble because I start from the 'consciousness' – 'object' distinction" (p.

200). Although he successfully criticizes the intellectual transcendence of Husserl's

phenomenology with his notion of the body-subject, Merleau-Ponty begins to realize

through the interpretation of his work that an embodied consciousness is insufficient

to overcome this classical distinction. This is because interpreting being-to-the-world

as an embodied consciousness is tantamount to the body-as-mediator-of-the-world

and instead "we have to deal with the meaning of the 'being' (sic) of embodied

consciousness, knowing that it is neither a consciousness nor an objective body"

(Barbaras, 2000, p. 85). This is a crucial step in explicating Merleau-Ponty's (1969)

phenomenology as ontology because he recognized that the consciousness – object

distinction continued to obscure those objective 'things' which are always already

ways of expressing "an event of brute or Wild being which, ontologically, is primary"

(p. 200). In short, there remains a relevant opposition between a reflective,

intellectual consciousness, and a pre-reflective, embodied consciousness. For me,

this step explicates a critical realism that questions the concept of intentionality itself.

As Flynn (2004) suggests, "Merleau-Ponty poses the question whether a

consciousness, defined as intentional, is adequate to think a notion of perception

viewed as the self-revelation of the sense of a world in and through a being which is itself a part of the world" (chap 7, ¶ 4).

In developing this line of thought, Merleau-Ponty introduces his notion of 'flesh' to designate an element of intercorporeality in which humans experience a sensuous reality of their world. Indeed, elemental 'flesh' is not like a Cartesian ethereal matter nor is it a spiritual life force nor is it a Husserlian noema or noesis but is comprised of "both me and the world – 'a texture' – and it is our ability to both see and be seen, to touch and be touched that both gives us that direct experience of the enfolded nature of flesh and presents us with an emblem of that enfolding" (Brook, 2005, p. 359). It is "the formative medium of the object and the subject (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, p. 147). To be sure, what Merleau-Ponty was suggesting was not that subject and object are clearly distinct, such would be a gross oversimplification, but they are correlative, and as such are bound together in a relation with a more profound and ubiquitous element, "as upon two mirrors facing one another where two definite series of images set in one another arise which belong really to neither of the two surfaces, since each is only the rejoinder of the other, and which therefore form a couple, a couple more real than either of them" (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, p. 139). Building on his former concept of horizon as a perceptual field in front of a subject, flesh becomes all-encompassing, just as water is for a fish:

Water, for a fish, is an in-depth universe in which it lives and which allows it to encounter and be present to all other marine beings, but which, precisely

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because water is for the fish the possibility of all presence, is not itself

something which is present. Being the medium of its life, water is what the

fish never sees; it is for the fish something which is everywhere and no-where.

Similarly, the flesh is that element which unites us to things and which makes

it be that the sentient body and the sensed thing are compatible with the same

universe. (Madison, 1981, p. 177)

Central to this is the notion is the reversibility of flesh which is brought to light in

Merleau-Ponty's (1969) final chapter, *The Intertwining – The Chiasm*. Borrowed

from neurology, the optic chiasm as a designation where the two focusing eyes

intertwine is used to structure the reversibilities and reciprocity between the seer and

the seen, touching and touched, invisible and visible, intimacy and alterity, language

and perception, or more generally, sensible and sentient (cf. Crossley, 1995; Evans &

Lawlor, 2000). Being both and one at the same time, flesh of the body and flesh of

the world, reversibility suggests an inseparable overlapping onto and intertwining into

one another. Consequently, the reversibility of the flesh calls into question the

dualistic account of an intentional conscious act toward an object, and while not

beginning with or rejecting consciousness, the experience of the flesh reworks

consciousness from the taking possession of things to a "simple openness that

develops from the interior of being" (Dastur, 2000, p. 35).

What Merleau-Ponty is suggesting is looking at flesh as being-in-the-world

qua dehiscence or openness and hence, 'Being' is sub-phenomenal, underneath

consciousness and its intentional relation to the world. Consequently, Merleau-Ponty (1969) insists the requisite is to "leave the philosophy of *Erlebnisse* and pass to the philosophy of *Urstiftung*" (p. 221). To the extent that the philosophy of *Erlebnis* as lived experience denotes what an intentional consciousness is directed at, it preserves the duality of consciousness and nature. Calling into question "intentional analysis" Merleau-Ponty (1969) states, "The whole Husserlian analysis is blocked by the framework of acts which imposes upon it the philosophy of consciousness" and this is not compatible with the flesh because it simply is "an ontology that obliges whatever is not nothing to present itself to the consciousness…as deriving from an originating donation which is an act, i.e. one *Erlebnis* among others" (p. 244). Passing to the philosophy of *Urstiftung*[11] as primal establishment allows one to be situated firmly on the Earth as the ground of all experience. Of course, the Merleau-Pontian sense of Earth, like that of the flesh, represents both the ground that supports our physical bodies and the fluid atmosphere in which we breathe (Abrams, 1988). This is why the later Merleau-Ponty (1969) refers much less often to the lived-body or body subject, preferring the flesh to signify the intertwining of the invisible with the visible, "to comprehend fully the visible relations one must go unto the relation of the visible with the invisible" (p. 216) and moreover, "it is through the flesh of the world that in the last analysis one can understand the lived-body" (p. 250). Hence, our

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[11] This concept has been only cursorily treated by English scholars and is usually referred to as the instituting of a scientific tradition (cf. Angus, 1998). My reading of Merleau-Ponty's usage of *Urstiftung* was to infer primal establishment as both a kind of rootedness and creation of which uphold conscious *Erlebnis.*

experiences in the world are not acts of consciousness as much as they are the openings of bodily flesh being filled primordially by the flesh of the world. In contrast, Merleau-Ponty calls sensible consciousness the invisible of the visible where no distinction exists between sensible and sentient but is the result of the dehiscence of the flesh and where perceptual meaning emerges (Madison, 1981). The imperative is to not discard lived experience any more than it is a conscious body-subject who perceives their experience but Merleau-Ponty is wary not only of further bifurcating that which is not but also of using language that can be misconstrued. He says, "stick close to experience, and yet not limit itself to the empirical but restore to each experience the ontological cipher which marks it internally" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 157). Furthermore, because consciousness is always taken up in the intentional relation (i.e., consciousness is the consciousness of something), it cannot see itself being-in-the-world as flesh, like the background on Rubin's vase discussed earlier. However, as Merleau-Ponty makes clear, even though being-in-the-world cannot simply be seen and hence described as shown to consciousness, it can be uncovered and its meaning presented "through an interpretation of phenomenological experience…which in its explosion and dehiscence gets differentiated and articulated in the seeing-visible, consciousness-object relation" (Madison, 1981, p. 193, 195).

We are deeply indebted to Merleau-Ponty for the prolegomena of a radical phenomenology in which I believe he was working towards. Six pages before his prescient *magnum opus*, *The Visible and the Invisible*, was cut short by his death

Merleau-Ponty (1969) writes we have reached, the "most difficult point" that is, "the bond between flesh and idea, and the internal armature which [it] manifests and which it conceals" (p. 149). Alongside other commentators, I believe Merleau-Ponty (1964) was attempting to radicalize our notions of the language of perceptual experience as 'wild logos' while working primarily within a phenomenological framework but also "to understand its relationship to non-phenomenology" (p. 178). Since then, other scholars have added to this body of knowledge which is increasingly considered ecophenomenology.

Ecophenomenologists have picked up the mantle from different phenomenological orientations but in particular, those with an abiding interest in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology have had significant impact and not only on this study. Hence, ecophenomenology, by extending the phenomenological work of Merleau-Ponty to contemporary ecological concerns (cf. Abram, 1996), not only fully embraces its own prefix but works to re-appropriate the use of the term. Building from the field's two seminal works, Erazim Kohak's *The Embers and the Stars* (1984) and Neil Evernden's *The Natural Alien* (1985), ecophenomenology is still a burgeoning field of study but is uniquely positioned to be the future in a growing communication between ecology and phenomenology. Indeed, as Grange (1977) pointed out in a 1975 lecture there was an emerging way of understanding ecology that "had yet to be structured, organized and given a name" (p. 136). The problem then as it is now in its current popular usage of the term, is that "ecology has become

a branch of classical physics, in spirit if not in exact content" that is concerned "not with experience or appreciating nature, but with predicting and controlling the living material of the world" (Evernden, 1985, p. 21). As a result, ecophenomenology seeks a relationship between ecology and phenomenology that is two-sided; through employing the phenomenological method broadly to ecological understanding, and ecological understanding providing insight to the phenomenological method (cf. Brown & Toadvine, 2003). Indeed, an ecophenomenology's *raison d'être* would be in re-appropriating the originary meaning of ecology as Toadvine (2001) has suggested:

> Usage aside, what is attractive about the term "ecology," in my opinion, is precisely its origin, like that of "economy," in the Greek *oikos*, home or dwelling. "Ecology" is literally the *logos* of the dwelling, a conjunction of concepts that retains a usefully rich ambiguity....[and] perhaps the reappropriation of this term, over and against the hegemony of naturalistic reduction, can open new ways to consider ourselves at home in nature, not to consider nature at home with itself. Ecology in the sense of the logos of home is a broad notion, and concerns at least the conjunction of (human and nonhuman) self and world, their boundaries and exchanges, the dimensions, that relate and divide them, and the practical, axiological, epistemological, and metaphysical issues raised at this meeting point. (p. 76-77)

To the extent that ecology – the *logos* of home – is *concerned* with the juncture of humanity and nature – where experience inherently exists – ecophenomenology is particularly suited to examining experiences in nature and in particular ecological experiences such as thru-hiking a long distance trail. As a result, an ecophenomenological approach to outdoor recreation experiences is uniquely prepared to examine not only what is an ecological experience but what is contextually experienced at different modes of experience. As discussed earlier, Dilthey's (1989) lived experience (*Erlebnis*) as a continuum of modes of experience allows a distinction that serves as a basis upon which to study the ecophenomenology of experience. However, *Erlebnis* must be only considered in light of our deliberation on the primal establishment (*Urstiftung*) of being-in-the-world and hence, lived experience is realized through the dehiscence of the flesh. Insofar that classical phenomenology returned to 'Sachen selbst' to initiate scientific investigations on the basis of pre-reflective experience, this has also been at the expense of reflection on this experience. As Kohak (1984) asserts, "I do not believe that the activity of conceptualization is itself at fault…Nor do I believe…that descriptive phenomenology is all that philosophy can, need, and ought to be" (p. 181). Indeed, by ceasing to focus solely on acts of consciousness, the late Merleau-Ponty's work sought to embrace experience in its entirety and thereby "emphasizes the continuity between perception, expression, and reflection" (Toadvine, 2005, p. 159). Ecophenomenology therefore reworks Merleau-Ponty's 'flesh' as a middle

ground of relationality between intentionality and causality; between the body and the

breathing earth (cf. Abram, 2005; Wood, 2001). Rather than completely discarding

intentionality, this means that intentionality becomes relationality in that sense that it

is structured by fundamental dimensions of the flesh which are inextricably tied to the

existentials of our embodiment. So, "while the real is not causal or determining

perception, there is an experience of opportunities and limits with which the body

must interact" (Coole, 2005, p. 124). To the extent that lived experience is realized

through the dehiscence of the flesh, the flesh is opened with a kind of 'wild logos';

through the body and through speech. Moreover, relationality, as both the junction

between ecology and phenomenology and the continuity between pre-reflective and

reflective experience, can be envisaged as the medium of 'wild logos' comprised of

both perceptual reciprocity and speech. Perceptual reciprocity is a pre-reflective

experience, a kind of participatory activity or conversation conducted underneath our

spoken discourse (Abram, 1988; Soffer, 2001) or what Friskics (2001) has called

Dialogical Relations with Nature. In this way, language is a medium whose genesis

is born out of the body's motility as a dehiscence of the flesh, a mutual constitution of

body-subject and field as a "dialectic of milieu and action" (Merleau-Ponty, 1965, p.

168). This perceptual reciprocity is continual as we live existentially in a "flow of

embodied practical activities" (Hughson & Inglis, 2002, p. 4) and serves to ground

the more thematized exchange in speech. As Abram (1988) so eloquently evokes:

The immediate perceptual world, which we commonly forget in favor of the

human culture it supports, is secretly made up of these others; of the staring

eyes of cats, or the raucous cries of birds who fly in patterns we have yet to

decipher, and the constant though secret presence of the insects we brush from

the page or who buzz around our heads, *all of whom make it impossible for us*

to speak of the sensible world as an object – the multitude of these nonhuman

and therefore background speakings, gestures, glances, and traces which impel

us to write of the trancendencies and the "invisibility" of the visible world,

often without our being able to say just why…. If language is born of our

carnal *participation* in a world that already *speaks to us* at the most immediate

level of sensory experience, then language does not belong to humankind but

to the sensible world of which we are but a part. (p. 115 & 117, emphasis in

original)

Nonetheless, we must be careful to distinguish this gestural conversation or

dialog as part of sensorial consciousness which is before reflective thought and

speech as symbolic communication (cf. Vogel, 2006). Our potential as humans is not

limited to perceptual reciprocity but goes beyond to more familiar conceptions of

language as speech. A detailed account of the complexity of language or semiotics is

beyond the scope of this dissertation but with regard to experience it is important to

note that "[w]hen I begin to reflect my reflection bears upon an unreflective

experience" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p. xi). As discussed earlier, language and

perception are part of the reversibility of flesh and hence, a collaborative project of reversible intersubjectivity (Davis, 1991). Subsequently, through an ecophenomenological approach speech may be thought of as the expression of perception to recover a pre-reflective experience even as the body-subject creates primordial meaning and extends this to sedimented meaning (cf. Lanigan, 1991). In short, as being-in-the-world, the body-subject's pre-reflective motility and reflective speech is the dehiscence of the flesh upholding and bringing forth lived experience. Consequently, by examining the relationality of the lived body a rapprochement not only theoretically but methodologically is achieved for examining first pre-reflective and then reflective modes of experience along the full continuum of *Erlebnis*.

2.7 FINAL COMMENTS

In this chapter I have attempted to provide an overview of my perspective preceding the empirical portion of this study. By tracing the contours and streams of my own thoughts in an effort to better understand the vicissitudes of experience during a long distance hike, I have brought together various literatures on the subjects involved. To the extent that this study is, in many ways, an embodied but also intellectual exploratory quest, I am reminded of E.F. Schumacher's (1977) words in *A Guide for the Perplexed*:

> All through school and university I had been given maps of life and
> knowledge on which there was hardly a trace of many of the things that I most
> cared about and that seemed to me to be of the greatest possible importance to

the conduct of my life. I remembered that for many years my perplexity had

been complete; and no interpreter had come along to help me. It remained

complete until I ceased to suspect the sanity of my perceptions and began,

instead, to suspect the sound-ness of the maps. (p. 1)

It is this kind of realization that has sparked my interest in both the intellectual and

pragmatic pursuit of this study and will hopefully precipitate an internal reassessment

for the outdoor recreation literature. Having now taken some time to review the

pertinent literature and outline my theoretical orientations, I turn in the next chapter to

outline the specifics of conducting this study – doing the research.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND DOING THE RESEARCH

3.1 THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL POSTURE

While it may be true that most sciences have their own specific methods, methodology is often erroneously used synonymously with 'method' (cf. Campbell & Bunting, 1991), particularly a complex method or body of methods, rules, and postulates employed by a discipline. By contrast, methodology focuses on the best means for acquiring knowledge about the world (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) or, methodology of epistemology and therefore directs how inquiry should proceed. What appears to happen in many cases, for example, is that the survey or interview is used as a generic method without consideration of how it is to be used in a particular methodology (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). The misuse of methodology obscures an important conceptual distinction between the tools of scientific investigation (properly *methods*) and the principles that determine how such tools are deployed and interpreted. Instead, "methods and methodology display a synergetic relationship" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 162). To the extent that there are multiple ways of developing research questions and the ensuing methodology to investigate them does not preclude researchers from utilizing basic belief systems from which scientific inquiry proceeds. Subsequently, what we know about experiential recreation is due largely because of the manner in which we approach our research (Weissinger, 1990; Patterson and Williams, 1998).

Elusive in many ways and full of enigmatic neologisms, "phenomenology is accessible only through a phenomenological method" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p. viii). Indeed, describing phenomena and their essences or invariant structures is a basic premise of most phenomenological research. Furthermore, there are arguably as many phenomenological methodologies as there are phenomenologists. Among the many divergent orientations, there is ethical, existential, hermeneutical, interpretive, linguistical, social, and transcendental, no to mention ecological phenomenology. However, as we have seen it is no longer satisfactory to simply adopt classic phenomenology's foundations, including its methodology. To the extent that classic Husserlian transcendental phenomenology would employ the eidetic method comprised of epoche, phenomenological reduction (complete reduction), imaginative variation and synthesis (cf. Giorgi, 1997; Moustakas, 1994) the imperative is to consider if these methods coalesce with the theoretical contribution outlined in Chapter 2. They do not. In addition, the burgeoning field of ecophenomenology has, to date, been an exercise in philosophical phenomenology thereby carving out the field's metaphysics. In my reading of the literature, Toadvine (2001) represents the only account that has explicitly discussed ecophenomenological methodology, and maintains, "this issue remains the most contested and, in many ways, the most fertile area of ecophenomenological investigation" (p. 82). As a result, my methodological treatment is a *bricolage* of specific methods derived from my careful and comprehensive reading of the literature in an attempt to construct a systematic,

methodical, general, and critical approach to the empirical portion of this dissertation. Notwithstanding these difficulties/opportunities, my fidelity remains to some basic methodological commonalities among phenomenological enquiries while offering some new insights to understanding ecological experiences. Moreover, through my treatment of postcolonial theory to decolonize experiences and ecophenomenology to investigate the experience (s) of thru-hikers, we end up with an explication process that embraces both discursive and dialectical possibilities. As a result, this highlights the importance of employing methodological strategies that complement the collection of explicitly retrospective assessments (i.e., in-depth interviews) with strategies that focus upon capturing the often pre-reflective, real-time unfolding of behavior (i.e., observation).

Many commentators agree that while many orientations can create confusion, not to mention a certain level of reticence, all phenomenology holds to: the importance of the lived experience, a solid understanding of philosophical perspectives, an opposition to absolutist and reductionistic science, and that experience has a certain discoverable and invariant structure, its essence (cf. Caelli, 2001; Cresswell, 1998; Dukes, 1984; Relph, 1970; Willis, 2004). Central to phenomenological methodology as well as a main result of analysis, an essence is "understood as a structure of essential meanings that explicates a phenomenon of interest" thereby illuminating the "essential characteristics of the phenomenon without which it would not be that phenomenon" (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 11). Husserl, as

well as Merleau-Ponty made essences central to their philosophy however whereas

for Husserl (1989) essences are given in the intentional relationship, for Merleau-

Ponty (1969) essences belong to the reversibility of flesh. Subsequently, there are no

pure essences; there are only 'operative essences' or dimensions which as phenomena

refer back to the sub-phenomenal flesh (Madison, 1981). Moreover, van Manen

(1990) suggests that an essence can mean more than simply some ultimate core:

> A good description that constitutes the essence of something is constructed so
>
> that the structure of the lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion
>
> that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in
>
> a hitherto unseen way. (p. 39)

As a result, the focus of this research is to explicate the dimensions of phenomena

which is accomplished through systematic process. However, phenomenology is not

simply reducible to a list of mechanistic procedures and as such; is more a research

posture (Yeung, 2004). The phenomenological posture or attitude, in contrast to the

natural attitude, seeks to elucidate our presuppositions and assumptions in order to

understand a phenomenon of interest. A researcher carries out this posture through

the phenomenological reduction. Once again, referring to Husserlian

phenomenology, the reduction is meant to bracket all prejudgments, biases, and

preconceptions (Moustakas, 1994) in order to see the intentional object as it simply is.

However, since there is no pure essence or transcendental object, we must realize

"[t]he most important lesson the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a

complete reduction" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p. xv). This is because the researcher is

of the same flesh he/she is researching. Consequently, it can be difficult to

distinguish and explicate ourselves from the phenomenon and our biases. Of course it

is ludicrous to think we can ever be completely bias-free but in phenomenological

description, we strive to be conscious of our presuppositions. Indeed, following

Merleau-Ponty, Ashworth (1999) asserts that bracketing is retained "as the process of

a return to the prereflective world…to the resolve to set aside theories, research

presuppositions, ready-made interpretations etc., in order to reveal engaged, lived

experience" (p. 708). It is ironic that the phenomenological reduction is in effect the

antithesis of reductionism which leads to some confusion and awkwardness in

terminology. Likewise, bracketing connotes a mathematical referent, as in placing

certain figures outside the brackets. Accordingly, Dahlberg (2006) suggests

borrowing the metaphor of 'bridling' from horseback riding. At the risk of a long

quotation, Dahlberg (2006) elicits bridling to not only cover the meaning of

bracketing but:

> 'bridling' moreover covers an understanding that not only takes care of the
>
> particular pre-understanding, but the understanding as a whole. We bridle the
>
> understanding so that we do not understand too quick, too careless, or
>
> slovenly, or in other words, that we do not make definite what is
>
> indefinite…bridling means a reflective stance that helps us 'slacken' the firm
>
> intentional threads that tie us to the world…[which] means to scrutinize the

involvement with, this embodiment of, the investigated phenomenon and its meanings…Bridling, as that phenomenological attitude in research, means to be 'actively waiting' for the phenomenon, and its meaning(s), to show itself and is an activity characterized by a kind of 'non-willing' or 'dwelling' with the phenomenon. It is important that we emphasize this, because it is by no means something that could be understood as a methodological technique. (p. 16)

In addition, as a study following the vestiges of Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology, this project approaches 'bridling' in a similar way that Gearing (2004) does existential bracketing.

Building on what has already been discussed; this form of existential bridling holds suppositions and theories in abeyance for the investigation of lived experience. Peculiar to this existential form are porous and flexible boundaries at later stages of study allowing other elements to merge with the study and reciprocally allowing phenomenal elements to reinvest with the larger whole (Gearing, 2004). Insofar as we are intertwined in, and our lived experience articulated from, the flesh of the world, in a dialectic of milieu and action, I consider a guided existential and ecological reflection as part of my methodology. Existential and ecological reflections entwine each other relationally, carving out the contours of the lived experience of each participant and hence provide appropriate and productive categories through which lived experience can be explored. Moreover, the

reversibility of the flesh can be deciphered through its dehiscence in the lifeworld (Madison, 1981; Merleau-Ponty, 1969) which can be explicated according to four existentials: communality (social relations), corporeality, spatiality, and temporality (Raheim & Haland, 2006; Thomas, 2005; van Manen, 2002). Consequently, explicating phenomenal dimensions of the lived experience of thru-hikers necessarily includes bridling, as reflectively and ecologically dwelling with the phenomena through these four existentials. By attending to the ecology of the (existential) experience, I am better able to explicate the pre-reflective experience that underlies the reflective accounts of research participants.

3.2 DOING THE RESEARCH

3.2.1 Site and Sample

The proposed location for this study was the entire length of the Appalachian Trail however, since my own thru-hike was inadvertently shortened because of injury, my participant interactions mostly occurred within the southern half of the AT where I currently was located and due to logistical and financial constraints. Research participants were randomly intercepted at six different locations while hiking on the AT throughout various times and days of the week in May and June of 2006. The six intercept points were chosen because of ease of access to the trail (i.e., trailhead, road crossing, etc.) and to gain perspectives from hikers with various experiences and miles hiked (see Table 1). The vast majority (65%) of thru-hikers are called Northbounders because of the geographical direction of their hike. Southbounders

comprise 10% of thru-hikers, flip-floppers (5%), and section-hikers 20%[12].

Subsequently, while I was not looking specifically for Northbounders, they represent

100% of my sample, given the predominance of this type of thru-hiker. Moreover,

insofar that the extended hiking experience, immersed in the long trail environment,

is of particular consideration for this study, a delimiting question was asked to elicit

whether or not the hiker was attempting a thru-hike of the AT rather than a shorter

hike. During our introductory conversation (see Appendix A) when a prospective

participant was identified, I provided him/her with more information about the study

(see Appendix B). As a result, my sample is both selective and purposive

(Cresswell, 2003) consisting of 27 adults, comprised of 16 men and 11 women, aged

18 to 65, with a mean of 919.5 miles (1480 km) hiked[13]. No thru-hikers declined to

participate, meaning I intercepted 27 thru-hikers and interviewed the same. However,

after introducing myself, I found it interesting that thru-hikers appeared slightly more

comfortable to talk at length with me given the fact that I had been a thru-hiker as

well, albeit for only a few days.

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[12] Northbounders hike from Springer Mountain to Katahdin in one continuous journey. Southbounders hike from Katahdin to Springer Mountain in one continuous journey. Flip-floppers complete the Trail in one trip, but with an alternate itinerary. Section-hikers complete the Trail in more than one trip. Total thru-hike completions recorded by the ATC in 2003 and 2004 was 580 and 540, respectively. (See www.appalachiantrail.org)

[13] It is noteworthy that through www.trailjournals.com I was able to learn that 70% of my sample completed their respective thru-hike of the AT leaving 3 hikers that did not and 5 with an unknown status.

Table 1

Interview Intercept Points along the Appalachian Trail

Intercept Point	Distance from Southern Terminus	Number of Hikers Interviewed
Petites Gap	1210 km (751.9 miles)	7
Hog Camp Gap	1285 km (798.9)	4
Rockfish Gap	1364 km (847.6)	2
Skyland, SNP	1479 km (919.1)	6
Crampton Gap	1641 km (1019.9)	6
501 Shelter	1899 km (1179.8)	2
TOTALS	M = 1480 km(919.5 miles)	Total = 27

Note. SNP refers to Shenandoah National Park.

All participants seemed to appreciate my story and could easily associate with my injury. This perhaps allowed me more of an 'insider' role and my affiliation appeared to put the participant at ease.

3.2.2 Collecting Empirical Materials

This study, concerned with the lived experiences of AT thru-hikers can be characterized as a phenomenology that is ecological, existential, and embodied. Moreover, employing these three phenomenological approaches complements a desire for a holistic investigation. To the extent that phenomenology concentrates on the lived experience of research participants, the imperative is to explicate

experiences that range the full continuum of *Erlebnis*. As a result, specific strategies

such as observation and in-depth interviewing follow from these complementary

approaches thereby allowing a more rigorous examination of the pre-reflective –

reflective continuum of experience. However, these methods should not be viewed as

a separated and mechanical procedure. Observation is as much a part of the interview

as interviewing is part of observation. Moreover, as a result of there being no specific

methods for an ecophenomenological approach, the imperative is to build on theory

and pioneer an approach. In light of this I have borrowed from various sources to

form an emergent *bricolage* in what I would like to call an ecologically-active

interview.

3.2.2.1 Ecologically-Active Interviews

Interviewing is much more than the neutral exchange of asking questions and

getting answers; it is two people involved in a collaborative, active process "that leads

to a contextually bound and mutually created story – the interview" (Fontana & Frey,

2005, p. 696; cf. Kvale, 1983). Likewise, observation has been characterized as "the

fundamental base of all research methods" (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 389) in social

sciences and while interviewing employs observational techniques, Angrosino (2005)

argues that observation is not so much a specific method but a context in which to

situate one's research. Ecologically-active interviewing (EAI) borrows heavily from

active interviewing (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), reenactment interviewing (Drew,

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1993), and the classical sociologist's, Georg Simmel, approach, referred to as the Simmelian Switch (cf. Gross, 2001).

EAI is similar to active interviewing in that it recognizes the interview as interpretive practice and collaborative meaning construction by both participant and researcher. The ebb and flow of active interviews "ideally resembles the informal structure of everyday talk, with the aim to build and explore intersubjective understandings" (Hathaway & Atkinson, 2003, p. 164) of lived experience. Hence, active interviews are guided to "activate narrative production" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 39) but remain intentionally open-ended and flexible in order to provide the participant to determine for themselves the most important dimensions. EAI's affinity to reenactment interviewing emerged out of a necessity in the field as part of this study recognizing the lived body as a phenomenological datum (cf. Schrag, 1988). To the extent that pre-reflective experiences are embodied and tacit, eliciting the body's motility in the interview process allows the dehiscence of flesh to 'come alive' and assists participants in reflecting on these experiences. For this reason, in order to reveal the gestural conversation, the flow of embodied practical activities, which are pre-reflective in the lived experience, must be considered in the dialectic of milieu and action. Reenactment interviewing allows this dialectic to be explicated by interrupting the verbal dialogue in order for the participant to *show*, or perform, their tacit understandings of their experience (cf. Carlsson, Drew, Dahlberg, & Lutzen, 2002; Carlsson, Dahlberg, Lutzen, & Nystrom, 2004). As mentioned earlier, this

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approach emerged when a participant was unable to verbalize their experience and proceeded to act out what they have experienced, allowing them to make use of the body's memory to reflect on the experience.

What is now understandable is the use of these two methods for explication of both pre-reflective and reflective experience. EAI employs both in an effort to understand the participants' perspective of his/her experience both through speech and embodied action. However, orchestrating these two methods can be difficult and so I draw on the work of classical sociologist Georg Simmel (1858-1918) to utilize his two levels of observation in a technique known as 'the Simmelian switch'. The two levels of observation include the social and the natural, or the participant's environment, essentially observing the ecological position of a thru-hiker's experience. This approach is considered that much more important when examining thru-hikers' experiences in a natural environment, such as the AT, where the hiker's embodied motility is foundational to their experience. Although the observation starts with a focus on the social, the researcher "allows nature an independent voice" (Gross, 2001, p. 405). Simmel's observation was predicated on moving back and forth between the natural and the social, neither reducing society to nature, nor nature to society. As discussed, this technique is incorporated during participant interviews. Throughout this process, the researcher begins and relies on the narratives of the participants. Only when the participant indicates ambiguity, perplexity or inability to verbally express tacit knowledge does the researcher ask the participant to perform

their experience and hence, turn to their own observation of the natural surroundings and how the participant interacts with his/her environment. During the transition of observation, the researcher still continues to 'take the lead' from the participant by following their self-descriptions or pointing to the "boundaries of self-description" (Gross, 2001, p. 407).   Thus, the ecology of the experience is elicited and the participant can better express and reflect on the pre-reflective. The transition back to human from non-human observation enables the researcher to document the impact of the natural on the social. Without this ecological perspective, an approach that only talks about social interpretations, symbolic meanings, or social constructions, would be very one-sided and incapable of providing a social explanation with ecological understanding.

3.2.2.2 The Interview Process

Upon obtaining verbal consent, each participant was interviewed one-on-one and face-to-face with the exception of two occasions. At one point, there was a group of four thru-hikers inadvertently hiking together and all wanting to sit, talk and be interviewed. The other occasion included a married couple; each group provided very enjoyable and interesting conversation corresponding to what Holstein and Gubrium (1995) call multivocality in the active interview process. Conceptually the interviews were to last approximately one hour, however, thru-hikers were anxious to get back hiking after approximately 40 minutes and as a result, interviews averaged 35 minutes. The interview guide, found in Appendix C, was used to guide the

interview process and included a series of themes to be addressed with lead-in questions to initiate the dialog. The interview guide was designed to educe thru-hikers' lived experience from their own perspective and started by eliciting a meaningful story not only to initiate memorable events but to engage a relaxed, conversational atmosphere. Subsequently the interview was arranged according to lead-in questions organized under three thematic captions: General Experience, Nuances of the Experience, and Ideology & Experience. This organization was merely intended to facilitate the interview rather than adhering strictly to it as a survey.

Each interview usually began with the question, "Can you tell me a story about a meaningful experience you've already had during your thru-hike?" Subsequently, most participants began to speak freely about many funny or extraordinary events and usually shared anecdotes about what they learned. By and large, interviews required little prompting from me, and lead-in questions were used mostly as a checklist to ensure the relevant topics were covered. As mentioned previously, the group interviews provided especially rich dialog where participants' experiences were evoked by other participants' stories. Other than having to explicitly ask about wilderness through the question, "Benton MacKaye once said, 'The Appalachian Trail is a wilderness trail or it is nothing.' What do you think?", I rarely asked verbatim questions from the interview guide. My lack of reliance on the

prepared guide served to reinforce the salience of the topics being discussed and allowed further creativity in the ecologically-active interviews to emerge.

The interviews were digitally recorded and corresponding journal notes were written upon completion of the interviews. In my notes I took special care to attend to bodily descriptions during enactments as well as natural features that appeared to be of particular interest or concern to the participant. In addition, I wanted to make note of sensorial data that both I and the participant were experiencing during the interview and what the participant was or was not describing about their own experience. These notes served to assist later transcription and subsequent explication. However, rather than subjugating journal notes to only secondary data, I considered them equal to interview material in light of Merleau-Ponty's (1969) assertion that the phenomenologist needs to decipher phenomenological experience through the body's motility as the dehiscence of the flesh, just as I utilized ecologically-active interviewing.

Following completion of each interview, participants were asked if he or she would like to receive a summary of the study's findings. While all interviews were positive and participants friendly, all 27 participants declined any further follow up including a study summary. As a result, I thanked the thru-hiker for his/her participation and wished them well on their journey. It appeared that thru-hikers were just as glad to take a break from hiking as they were to start hiking after the interview and it did not matter whether they were contributing to a research study or simply

chatting about their experiences. In fact, numerous participants described how the

ecologically-active interview, involving story telling with acting, paralleled their own

story-telling times around campfires at many shelters along the AT. Nonetheless, in

the event I should be contacted, I prepared a thank you letter along with which a

summary of findings that can be mailed (see Appendix D).

3.2.3 Ethical Considerations

In Chapter 2, I discussed, in detail, the extent of my axiological assumptions

in conducting this study and why interpretive research can not be neutral. However,

research ethics also involves the daily pragmatic operations of a researcher's activity

which broadly seeks to avoid harm or wrongdoing to research participants and

colleagues and well as being open and transparent about the purpose and impact of a

research project. In light of these provisions, I strove to be cognizant of the potential

impacts associated with the operation of this study along the trail and took

appropriate measures to ensure minimal disruption. For example, I wanted to make

sure hikers did not interpret the operation of the study to disrupt their trail experience.

Moreover, Carlsson, et al. (2002) discusses the ethics of reenactments in light of their

potentially powerful sensorial impact. I was aware of this simply because I witnessed

it first-hand however, because of the positive nature of the experiences of thru-hikers,

reenactments appeared to be quite enjoyable. At all times the anonymity of the

participants was and will continue to be respected and maintained throughout the

entire process of the study and any subsequent publications through the use of

pseudonyms. Nonetheless, since all thru-hikers use pseudonyms, called trail names, and even though fellow thru-hikers would be the only people aware of the respective trail names, I chose to change trail names to ensure participant anonymity as well as assign ID numbers for use during the explication process.

3.2.4 Explication of Empirical Materials

While empirical explication[14] is an essential part of any research endeavor, a specific phenomenological approach is in order to remain centered on the lived experience of respondents. In this stage of a phenomenological research project it is important to employ specific methods only according to the methodology outlined earlier. This means that while the phenomenological method's objective is to describe the dimensions or operative essence of an experience lived, being what that experience meant to those who lived it, there still includes an interpretive component through the existential bridling work of the researcher. By relating with the world's objects, beings and things, a person is a being who perceives the world from different standpoints depending on the situation in time and space, who perceives particular perspectives that vary accordingly to the place of perceptual experiences. These concepts related to the existential structures of lived experience refer to the phenomenological methodology based on Merleau Ponty (1962), that is, when we ask a participant for descriptions of a certain phenomenon being investigated, we

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[14] Explication is favored over 'analysis' because Hycner (1999) cautions the later connotes a "'breaking into parts' and therefore often means a loss of the whole phenomenon" whereas the former suggests an "investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole" (p. 161).

understand that he/she will give this accordingly to their standpoint from where they perceive the phenomenon and that different people's perceptions, at different times and places, are given to us as several views from different perspectives of that phenomenon, which cross each other in intersubjectivity and present to us common meanings that enable us to understand that phenomenon's dimensions. However, a researcher must never forget that the phenomenon's dimensions are understood within our perspective as a researcher, which is another perspective, another field, another horizon. The phenomenon, thus, depends on a people's perceiving perspectives. As something that alternatively shows and hides itself, it shows itself to whoever perceives it according to human perception, which means one's perception from different standpoints in time and space. One could say that a phenomenon is never seen in its totality, because this would be an abstraction; the convergence of several perspectives, however, leads us to perceive a phenomenon's structure. In short, just as EAI is a collaborative process between researcher and respondent where empirical materials are comprised of both interviews transcripts and journal notes, it is imperative to recognize the porous boundaries of existential bridling during the explication process. Contrary to the bifurcation many researchers make between descriptive and interpretive phenomenology (cf. Lopez & Willis, 2004), which I believe to be a false dichotomy, ecophenomenology, in seeking the relationality of hikers in their worldly engagement seeks to initially bridle preconceptions to allow

participants' perspectives to emerge but fully recognizes the researcher's subsequent and ever present interpretive role in the explication process.

The explication of empirical materials can be thought of generally as a tripartite structure and is described as a movement between whole-parts-whole. In order to arrive at a satisfactory process, I reworked some nuances in the procedures developed by Giorgi (1997), Polkinghorne (1989), and Valle, King, and Halling (1989). As a result, my process comprised five stages: Holistic Reading, Existential Reflection, Cluster Initial Meaning Units, Aggregate Converging Points, and Develop Experiential Dimensions (see Figure 3).

However, the explication process really begins when interviews become scribed text. Since I digitally recorded my interviews it was quite easy for me to email the recorded files to a digital transcription service (www.gmrtranscription.com). The transcripts were returned to me as Microsoft Word .doc files upon which I read completely through each transcript twice while listening to the respective audio files in order to check for transcription accuracy and edited any necessary discrepancies. While editing, I sometimes added punctuation or re-typed words that were misunderstood during transcription. This happened frequently because of the many thru-hiker neologisms of which the professional transcriptionist was not familiar. The edited transcripts for this dissertation resulted in excess of 250 single-spaced pages of transcribed text. Nevertheless, I feel this was productive as it allowed me to make

Whole

Idiographic

Part

Nomothetic

Whole
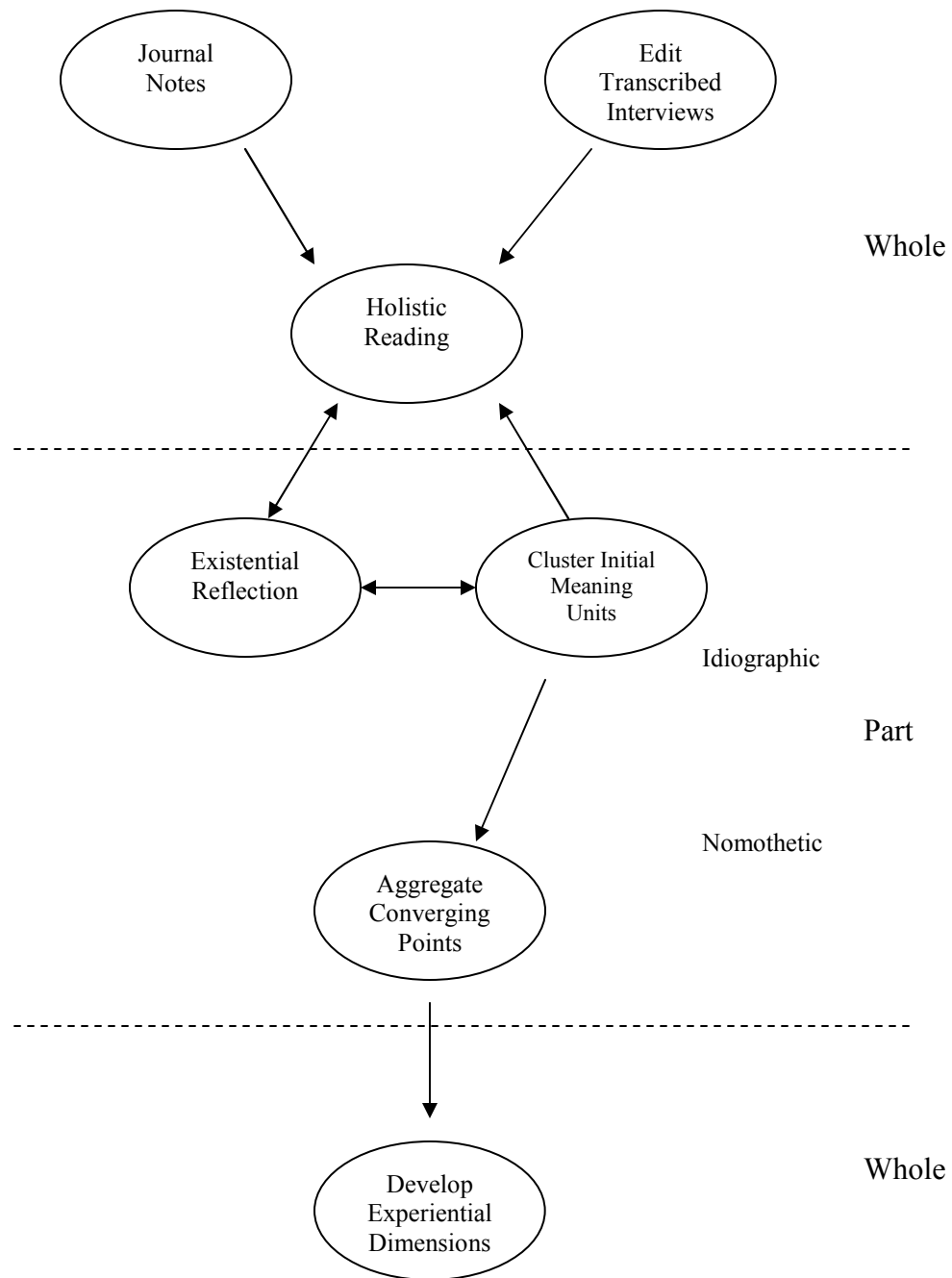
Figure 3. **Empirical Explication Process**

further notes as I listened to the inflection in the participants' narratives while I reflected on the transcripts.

3.2.4.1 Holistic Reading

The holistic reading stage of empirical explication was a continuation of the editing process just described. However, the emphasis here is on understanding the information in terms of the whole before it is understood in terms of its parts. Moreover, I exercised a 'strict' bridling to avoid any temptation in speculating or going beyond what was simply given in the text. Reading for a simple sense of the whole brought me to a level of familiarity with the texts allowing them to open up and reveal an overall theme situated within that particular transcript. I repeated this process until I was immersed in the written material enough to feel comfortable to understand its parts. I believe this to be an essential part of explicating lived experience which I returned to several times and helped me remain grounded in later stages of the study.

3.2.4.2. Existential Reflection

When the texts become familiar as a whole, the nature of the understanding changes so that different parts begin to emerge. Hence, this stage signaled the distinction between idiographic and nomothetic levels of understanding. Initially suggested by Windelband (1894/1998) an idiographic perspective looks at specifics whereas nomothetics looks at things in general. Although I was still reading the transcripts as one complete text, I was guiding my reading according to the existential

reflection discussed as part of my methodology. Communality, corporeality, spatiality, and temporality allowed me to think in terms of existential experiences of both verbal and gestural conversation. By focusing on the idiographic nature of texts and reflecting existentially substantially increased my understanding of each individual interview. However, perhaps most important during this phase was explicating the participants' embodied disclosure in the interviews. This relied heavily on my journal notes while referring to the respective transcript text in order to elicit a better understanding of the thru-hikers bodily motility and sensorial experience. Following Finlay's (2006) concept of bodily empathy, I could then reflect on certain bodily descriptions that I had made in my journal and by associating the corresponding transcript excerpt, decipher how the embodied experience was transformed into speech (see also Shakespeare, 2006; Stelter, 2000). This process points directly to pre-reflective experiential meaning making by the participants as expressed and enacted through the interview process. As you can read with my choice of words here, my bridled boundaries were beginning to become more porous as I deciphered the dialectic of milieu and action along with the textual materials.

3.2.4.3. Cluster Initial Meaning Units

My next stage involved re-reading the texts but this time extracting initial meaning units in the form of actual transcript and journal excerpts. Since my transcripts were in .doc format, I could easily use Microsoft Word's macro programming language adapted from Ryan (2004) to tag and retrieve blocks of text

(see Appendix E). Through a dialectic process of finding differences and similarities, oppositions and repetitions of ideas in the texts, or as Gadamer (2004) asserts to 'interrogate' the text, the blocks of text were tagged according to initial meaning units. Once I had exhaustively tagged all transcripts for initial meaning units, I read again for a sense of the whole, reflected existentially, and tagged any new meaning units that had emerged. Although my journal notes were not in Word format to tag, I highlighted meaning units with the associated tagging being done on the computer. The second step of this stage involved transformation of the subject's language into language of the discipline (Giorgi, 1997). Up to this point the participants' voice had been dominant in the text, but in order for common themes to emerge, the researcher "transforms participants' everyday expressions into expressions appropriate to the scientific discourse supporting the research" (Sadala & Adorno, 2001, p. 289). As a result, I could retrieve the tagged excerpts and transfer them to a new file of which had not yet been named.

3.2.4.4. Aggregate Converging Points

This stage of the explication process is a movement from an idiographic perspective to nomothetics and is inherently a reflective and creative process. The files containing tagged blocks of text from various transcripts and journal entries needed to be identified according to a common meaning. As a result, I read through the extracted excerpts, reflected on the holistic context and my own embodied experience of the phenomena and collated these ideas into explicative themes (cf.

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Devenish, 2002). The converging points that led to this stage are aggregated and, in the researcher's language, the best possible descriptor is used to express the engaged texts. Moreover, I chose thematic headings that represented the dialectical nature of the meaning units that comprised the converging points.

3.2.4.5. Develop Experiential Dimensions

At this point, the text is believed to be emptied of all meanings and once again is considered a whole. The nomothetic perspective from the last stage allows the researcher to see all converging points as bound together and as such, abstracting the explicative themes into experiential dimensions produces a composite summary or operative essence of the lived experience (Groenewald, 2004). The headings I chose for each dimension were intended to capture the common underlying meanings within that dimension. Indeed, the organization of the dimensions reflected original meaning units that were expressed by research participants. However, it is important to note that these dimensions are not categorically exclusive as there are overlaps in each area, just as there are in all aspects of lived experience.

The experiential dimensions that emerged from this research include: Perseity, Sojourning, Kinship, and Wild Imbrication and are described in the following chapter. One additional dimension (Ecoliteracy) emerged as a result of my investigation into wilderness ideology and colonized experiences. Since this dimension is the result of my direct questioning about ideological concepts, it is not recognized as part of the dimensions of a thru-hiker's experience and is not included

in the next chapter. However, this dimension does represent important implications

for the overall direction and purpose of this dissertation and hence, will be discussed

in Chapter 5.

3.2.5 Evaluating the Research

Evaluating qualitative research has been at the center of many debates in

recent years concerning the so-called crisis of representation and legitimation (cf.

Angen, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln, 1995; Swandt, 2001).

Phenomenology, as part of the interpretive paradigm, fairs perhaps the least of all

given its inherent nature to elude specific definition along with its many nuanced

iterations. Moreover, as Schwandt (1996) questioned the notion of a strict allegiance

to "criteriology" (p. 59), I also recognize the importance of truth claims in writing

qualitative texts. So far, I have attempted to address such concerns at the theoretical

level with regard to the impossibility of a complete phenomenological reduction, and

operative essences or dimensions rather than a naïve pure essence of direct lived

experience. In addition, the sections that have been reflexively written on my biases,

values, and axiological assumptions are more than simply disclosures; they embody

what I as a researcher bring to this dissertation. Phenomenological writing is a

central concern in this research because "a good phenomenological text has the effect

of making us suddenly 'see' something in a manner that enriches our understanding

of everyday life experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 345). Nonetheless, in the search

for research evaluation criteria, rigor is an important issue in all research (Morse,

Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002; Turner, 2003) to ensure high quality research methodology. However, the use of generic, qualitative criteria such as trustworthiness and credibility (cf. Beck, 1994; Koch, 1994; Patterson & Williams, 2002) has become problematic given the conspicuous nature of philosophy in phenomenological methodology. In light of these issues, de Witt and Ploeg (2006) conducted an exhaustive study of phenomenological nursing research and suggested a revised framework for evaluating phenomenological research. The framework is to be seen as an expression of rigor and includes: balanced integration, openness, concreteness, resonance, and actualization. The first two expressions are centered on the research process whereas the later three attend to the study findings.

Balanced integration refers to the study's ability to articulate and intertwine philosophical tenets through the study including the outcomes. This allows participants' texts to be woven around the philosophical themes which drive the research process. Openness is twofold: it involves the phenomenological posture which has been discussed at length and sustains the process of research but it also involves opening up the study to scrutiny. There is little doubt that this study, being inspected by a doctoral examination committee, requires openness to scrutiny! The third expression of rigor turns its focus on the concreteness of research findings and refers to the style of phenomenological writing previously mentioned as well as practical utility such as: Does the research answer the questions that stimulated it? Building on the notion of concreteness, the fourth and fifth expressions of rigor are

resonance and actualization, respectively. Whereas resonance describes the experiential effect on the reader that the findings should convey, actualization implies that different interpretations and subsequent experiential effects may continue in the future. In short, the process of interpretation is not static and hence, does not end at the conclusion of a study. In developing this framework, de Witt and Ploeg (2006) recognize that others will continue to refine and suggest other frameworks for interpretive rigor however, they warn against a rigid approach that can "stifle creativity and innovation in research design and method" (p. 226).

Being a novice researcher, I recognize that this study is far from a work of perfection however, throughout the research process I strove to bridle not only my presuppositions toward the phenomena being studied but also the temptation to be overly rigid. I believe it was through this research posture that the following research findings were allowed to emerge as well as the creativity that emerged in my methodology.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS – DIMENSIONS OF THRU-HIKERS' EXPERIENCE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I present the dimensions resulting from the empirical

explication process outlined in Chapter 3. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate

the ecophenomenology of Appalachian Trail thru-hikers' experience in terms of four

broad dimensions that emerged from the explication of 27 participant interview

transcripts. These four dimensions provide the operative essence of a thru-hiking

experience and sets the stage for revealing colonized experiences within thru-hikers'

narratives which is presented in Chapter 5.

Table 2 discloses the research participants' summary information. While all

demographic information presented is consistent with the actual study participants,

the trail names[15] listed have been changed to ensure the anonymity of those involved

along with the corresponding ID number. Of the 27 participants in the study, 17

separate interviews were conducted indicative of the number of people hiking

together. Eleven interviews were with individuals, four interviews included pairs of

hikers and two interviews consisted of separate groups of four. Of all the groups,

only two pairs had started the AT together, of which one couple was married and the

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[15] Trail names are both a moniker and a pseudonym for thru-hikers. Historically appropriated through a defining circumstance and given by another hiker, today many trail names are simply chosen by individuals to express a particular 'trail persona'. While trail names carry symbolic meanings for many thru-hikers I did not engage this aspect in the study.

Table 2

Participant Summary Information

ID	Trail Name	Gender	Age	Days on Trail	Intercept Point
1	Hinesfeet[1]	F	25	63	Petites Gap
2	Snapper[1]	F	23	64	Petites Gap
3	Tortoise[2]	F	31	77	Petites Gap
4	Old Goat[2]	M	58	61	Petites Gap
5	Nefa[3]	F	44	58	Petites Gap
6	Rootstepper[4]	M	47	47	Petites Gap
7	Snail[5]	F	41	66	Petites Gap
8	Miss Parkay[6]	F	27	80	Hog Camp Gap
9	Boulder[6]	M	38	80	Hog Camp Gap
10	Healds[6]	M	36	67	Hog Camp Gap
11	Chou-chou[6]	F	25	67	Hog Camp Gap
12	Walkabout[7]	M	28	77	Rockfish Gap
13	Caboose[7]	F	28	77	Rockfish Gap
14	Creik[8]	M	29	55	Skyland, SNP
15	Poles[8]	F	25	69	Skyland, SNP
16	Greyfox[8]	M	22	82	Skyland, SNP
17	Swiss Miss[8]	F	23	80	Skyland, SNP
18	Doc[9]	M	56	67	Skyland, SNP
19	Sumo[10]	M	21	74	Skyland, SNP
20	Shenanigans[11]	M	26	77	Crampton Gap
21	Sidestep[12]	M	25	70	Crampton Gap
22	Conductor[13]	M	47	81	Crampton Gap
23	Brother Thomas[14]	M	35	62	Crampton Gap
24	Energizer Bunny[14]	F	63	98	Crampton Gap
25	Pumpkin[15]	M	61	98	Crampton Gap
26	Andy Dufresne[16]	M	28	71	501 Shelter
27	Yoshi[17]	M	27	78	502 Shelter
TOTALS		Male = 65% Female = 41%	M = 35	M = 72	

Note. Participants with similar superscripts indicate groups and hence, also indicate the interview number. Days on Trail indicates number of days spent hiking at the time of interview.

other were no longer hiking together. In addition, one individual thru-hiker had also

started with a partner who had abandoned their thru-hike only one week prior to the

interview. All participants except for one were first-time thru-hikers and forty-one

percent of the participants were women.

Figures 4 and 5 show the four experiential dimensions along with the

corresponding converging points and meaning units. Numbered 1 to 27, the figures

make reference to both the participant involved (from the ID number in Table 2) and

the meaning unit which was expressed in the interview and which underlies the

converging point and experiential dimension. For ease of explication and illustration

I also assigned the experiential dimensions numbers: 1 for Perseity, 2 for Sojourning,

3 for Kinship, and 4 for Wild Imbrication. However, this should not imply a

hierarchy within the dimensions. For example, meaning unit numbered 24.2 refers to

participant ID 24 (trail name Energizer Bunny) and the dimension: Sojourning; in

particular, Unbounded Sojourning. Moreover, the participant quotations that are used

in this chapter once again utilize the respective trail name of the participant and can

refer the reader to these figures and hence, where the excerpt is located in the overall

explication process. While the figures were designed with the intention to show the

emergent and interrelated nature of the dimensions, they should not be conceived as

simply a linear process. However, the figures should connote the connectedness back

from each dimension to the respective meaning units. As can be seen in the figures,

not all transcripts resulted in explicating meaning units for each converging point and

Meaning Units   Converging Points   Experiential Dimensions

1.1
1.2
2.1
2.2
3.1
3.2
4.1
4.2   Ordinary
5.1
5.2
6.1
6.2   Perseity
7.1
8.1
8.2
9.1
9.2
10.1
10.2
11.1   Extraordinary
11.2
12.1
13.1
14.1
14.2
15.1
15.2
16.1
16.2
17.1
17.2   Bounded
18.1
18.2
19.1
19.2
20.1
20.2   Sojourning
21.1
21.2
22.1
22.2
23.1
23.2   Unbounded
24.1
24.2
25.1
25.2
26.1
26.2
27.1
27.2

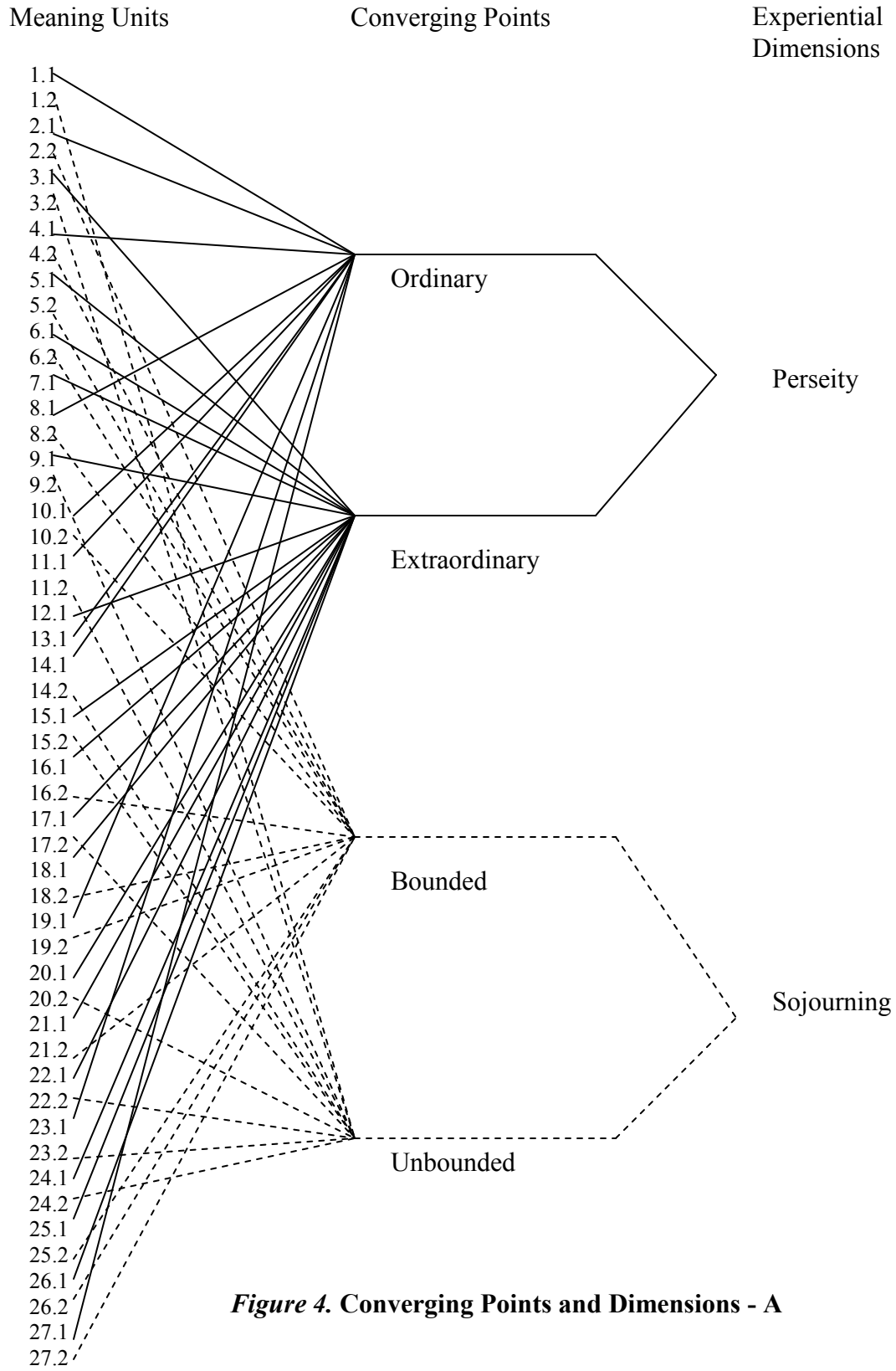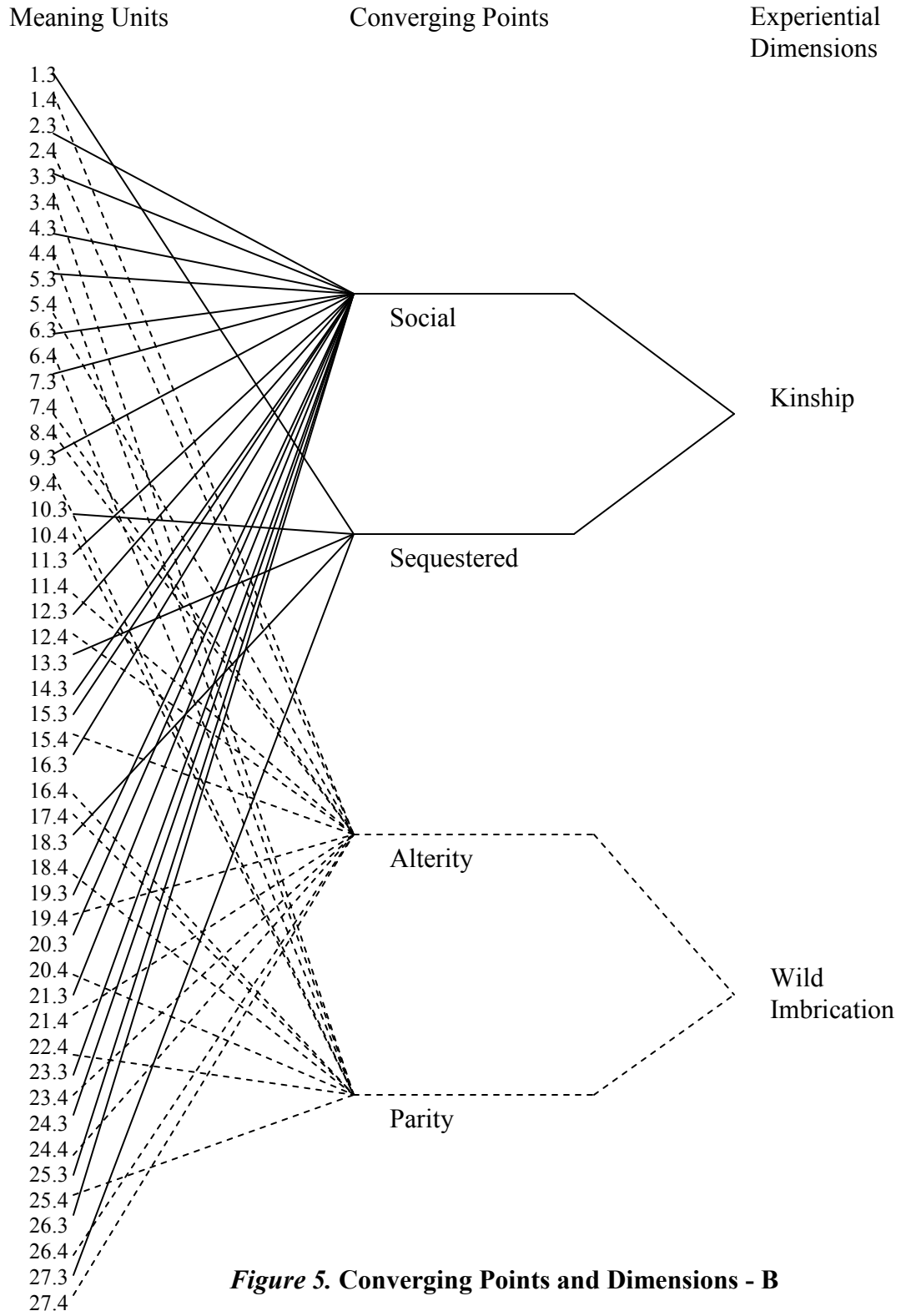*Figure 4.* **Converging Points and Dimensions - A**

Figure 5. **Converging Points and Dimensions - B**

dimension however, since the interviews attempted to cover a wide array of issues,

most participants elicited perspectives that became meaning units in the ensuing

explication process.

The interwoven nature of the four dimensions is necessarily the relationality

of thru-hikers' experience, that is, the relations and interactions in this ecological

experience. Therefore, these dimensions suggest not only intersubjectivity between

fellow thru-hikers and thru-hikers and their environment, but intersubjectivity

between the dimensions themselves. In many ways the existential nature of the

experience is rooted in the ecology of the experience or expressed differently,

Erlebnis (lived experience) is rooted in *Urstiftung* (primal establishment).

In short, the experiential dimensions that emerged in this study represent a diverse

and complex range of ecological experiences of AT thru-hikers. I will return to these

issues later but I think continuing to be cognizant of these concepts provides a clearer

picture of the dimensions I am about to discuss.

The excerpts that are presented in this chapter were selected to represent and

support the dimensions that emerged from the explication process and were chosen on

two primary criteria. First, I tried to select excerpts that most clearly and concisely

exemplified the dimensions. In some cases, just one or two excerpts were necessary

to illustrate a point. Conversely, when there were subtle nuances in meaning or

expression, I selected excerpts that depict these differences. Secondly, I tried to use

excerpts from across the full range of empirical materials. This means that although

some participants were more articulate thereby providing particularly rich sources of excerpts, I also chose others who were slightly less articulate to represent the full range of interviews. To be sure, I used these so-called less articulate sources to illuminate the oftentimes tacit and embodied experiences that hikers have and as such are only less articulate in a verbal sense. These participants were usually more able and readily willing to enact their experiences and in such cases, I present the journal notes written during my observation and interviews. The organization of this chapter is not intended to imply a hierarchical ordering of dimensions; rather I present each dimension with a précis interpretive description, then the respective dialectical converging points as sub-themes and supporting excerpts in order to facilitate the flow of this discussion. Rather than neatly situating excerpts in the text, where I feel they often get lost or overlooked, I wanted to present these findings as a way to trace back from the interpretive portion to the source of my interpretation as rooted in the field of this research thereby highlighting both my account and the underpinning thru-hiker excerpts.

4.2 EXPERIENTIAL DIMENSIONS

4.2.1 Perseity

Emerging first was an underlying conception of living life in general but appeared particularly important to thru-hikers. Perseity, derived from its latin roots, per se, or 'in itself', without referring to anything else signifies the simple existence of thru-hikers. By referring to nothing else perseity also signals self-sufficiency

which was identified as a tacit piece in this dimension. When asked about general experiences while hiking the trail, some participants immediately began to recount each amazing vista they had in the previous few days or weeks while others would talk about hardships they had endured that at the time were not enjoyable, but emerged as meaningful experiences. However, probing deeper into the general experiences of thru-hikers, participants talked much more about the mundane nature of thru-hiking and, at the risk of sounding trite, ordinary, quotidian experiences comprised the vast majority of participants' experiences. These differences comprise the two dialectics of ordinary and extraordinary existential experience within this dimension. In the following paragraphs, each converging point related to the perseity of thru-hiking the AT is illustrated with representative interview excerpts.

4.2.1.1 Extraordinary Perseity

Participants liked to engage in stories that described extraordinary experiences while thru-hiking the AT. These stories, usually quite lengthy, depicted experiences that were not always enjoyable but usually connoted a level of experience that included adventure, excitement, and natural wonder and resulted in a sort of bragging right among thru-hikers. In many ways, these thru-hikers appeared to travel the trail in search of these experiences or, at the very least continued with the idea another awe-inspiring experience would soon happen and hence, were sometimes simply covering miles until the next extraordinary event occurred.

Boulder: There is an experience, it was a pretty amazing experience to look back on but it was kind of hell when it happened. When I was in the Smokies, it was late March and I had been with a group of - of seven people. And I crossed over Fontana, got into the Smokies on my own when a few ice storms hit and I had - I had never hiked in snow. I've never done anything like that. So I am hiking through ice storms. No visibility, there is a bare face up there with you know, ice blowing from all directions. And I get to - I get to the shelter that I am looking for. And curl into my sleeping bag. And I am sure that, you know, it's the end of the world. Big chunks of ice are falling on the roof, so forth. The next day we have an ice storm again and all of the sudden it's like okay, I have done this before. After we get to New - or I got to New Found Gap suddenly, I needed an X-ray. I thought I had a stress fracture. So I hitched into town and it turned out it was shin splints and they told me to, you know, take a few days off, but there is no way a hiker is going to take a few days off. So, I went back up into the mountains when a kind of a snow storm / blizzard hit and I was in so much pain from the shin splints that I could really only go from shelter to shelter and was terrified that I was going to be left alone up there in a shelter in 22 degrees. And, you know, I am just - I was afraid that I would be stuck there all by myself because people are moving on very quickly so they could get out of the mountains and luckily a ridge runner knew that I had a problem and he helped me out. Yeah, he was in touch with the ranger station and he carried my - all of my gear down a side trail. And, because there was two to three feet of snow, they really cushioned my legs so that I was able to walk most of the way down the mountain on my own and then I took about 12 days off trail. I did work for stay at a hostel at the bottom. And went back up into the Smokies to finish the trail and it was absolutely amazing. Because I had seen the place, I had seen the place in two, three feet of snow covered with ice and I got to say, it was - it was absolutely gorgeous. Even though I was in that much pain and that scared me. It was absolutely a stunning place to be in and then to go up and it's practically spring up there and things are turning green and there is flowers and I don't know. It just amazed me. It amazed - the whole experience did, I don't know, if I - the pain I could do without but I would love to do all the rest again (9.1).[16]

Poles: I was in the Smokies and at the beginning of the Smokies it is all warm 80 degrees, its like living at the beach. So, relaxed and nice and then we were at this - we got to the shelter that was completely full and I had to camp out back. But the only campsites it seemed were on top of the ridge, with really shallow soil. So, I setup my tarp tent on top of the ridge. And I invite my friend, my hiking partner Lush, to come in and sleep in there because he just had a single tarp and I thought he would stay dryer with me. But, alas the storm came, the wind, the hail came, the wind came, the

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[16] The notation after each excerpt refers to the numbered meaning unit corresponding to those in Figures 4 and 5

lightning came I was really scared and all night it is just pouring. And by morning there was a lake in-between me and Lush, our bags were completely soaked. We are just sitting there, just kind of laughing because - I'm like man, I have never been this wet in my life, you know. I thought maybe, I would stay dry but no, the stakes had come out of the ground and the tent was flapping. That was just a bad deal. So, all morning everything around was soaked and we needed a fire 'cause it was getting cold and we needed to dry our stuff off. So, we spent about five hours, shaving twigs with our pocket knives trying to get to the dry wood underneath to build a fire and took us three tries and took us forever and finally we got a fire going in the shelter when everybody was gone. Yeah and stayed there all day. And dried out everything. And it was - I felt really cool, because I was like yea, I'm using my pocket knife to survive, this is awesome. It was so much fun. And then we dried out and were good, which was a good thing because the next night one of those big freezes came where the fog blows in and freezes on the trees. There was like about an inch of freeze on everything. It was so pretty. That was - that was the prettiest day (15.1).

Sidestep: And we got up the next day and started to hike, got past Watauga Lake, we got up at like 4 O'clock in the morning. So, we could make the 40 miles. And that day we were coming over one of the ridges, it's where a house used to be… McQueens Knob, coming near McQueens Knob and there were some, we could see the white truck to the left near one of the forest service roads. And uh, you know, they tell you to have the orange blaze stuff on but we weren't thinking about that. And we never, never do and we were hiking through over the McQueens Knob and we hear one shot, like a gun shot and Miles looks around and he is in front of me a little bit and a guy was behind us, his name is Banshee. And we hear another shot and then I could see some of the bird shot going through the leaves and then I hear Miles just going, oh, and he falls over, and I was like oh, God, this guy's got shot. So I went over to him and he is like freaking out and he was like shaking. He said, "Man, they hit me, they hit me, they hit me, he said. We take his pack off and he is not hit anywhere except for like four places in his pack and it had put holes into fabric and that was it…and Banshee throws his pack down and starts running through the woods towards these like - toward these guys who are like, Turkey Hunters and uh, they hop into their white pick-up truck and take off like, down whatever road (21.1).

Through the participants' narratives it became germane that what was extraordinary per se was that these types of events could, in fact, even occur. That is, while many thru-hikers appeared to generally assume they would experience some form of extraordinary event while thru-hiking, each had their own supposition of

what comprised extraordinary and what surpassed their assumptions. It is the later that emerged to comprise this dimension in contrast to those experiences that were perceived as somewhat extraordinary in the early days and weeks of a thru-hike. More specifically, the perception of the former types of experiences tended to occur more often in the first few weeks of thru-hiking. In short, many experiences that were once perceived as extraordinary, in fact, morphed into ordinary experiences and what emerged in this dimension continued to surpass the participant's assumption, even after a period of time had passed between the experience and the reflection. As a result, it is the continual challenging and surpassing of an individual's supposition during reflection on certain experiences that remains as the essence of extraordinary perseity.

4.2.1.2 Ordinary Perseity

In contrast to extraordinary experiences, ordinary perseity comprised the vast majority of a thru-hiking experience – the simple existence of hiking mile after mile between the extraordinary experiences. Converging within this point were several nuanced meanings of ordinary experiences, some positive and some negative. In most cases the ordinariness and routinization of daily hiking comprised the simple life in contrast to their home life. The first several excerpts illustrate this point and, along with one enacted interview, are described below.

Miss Parkay: You have days where you hate this trail, you're just like, 'I'm never going to get up this mountain' but it passes, like - its like even though it's totally like this surreal lifestyle, its like got its good and bad, you know, and you can't really - I

mean I certainly enjoy the good experiences a lot more, but they're sometimes few and far between (8.1).

Brother Thomas: Oh, it totally simplifies things and your way of life, you would - everything you need you have on your back, and if you don't have something you need I guess you hopefully don't really need it (1.1).

Chou-chou: I think it's not even that it is positive or negative, it's just that that's the experience and I think that's a lot of thru-hiking the AT is, just you are out there, and you do and you don't really know what's going to happen and whatever happens you take it as it comes (11.1).

Sumo: You don't really need much gear to do it out here especially at this point and coming up, this is -- this is you don't need much - a little stove, you need a sleeping bag, a bag of food, or, you know, a journal and your pack, it's really - you become a minimalist when you are out here for a while (19.1).

Yoshi: My goal whenever I get into town is try and see what I can take out of my pack and get rid of…you just want to simplify because like…[puts on backpack and starts walking around talking] being done over half the trail now, I think a whole lot more about every single ounce that I put in there, you know, you don't put a lot of extraneous stuff 'cause your knees are going to tell you that it's on there. If you do you're going to hate it 'cause it's everyday man, like before… you know, I was constantly playing with the pack straps trying to get the weight off the shoulder that hurts or the hip that hurts or whatever and constantly moving where the load is in there and sometimes it creaked, sometimes it bounced….I think now that I have got the external like I have got to be careful going downhill, because it's kind of bouncing off on my back…and day in day out that sucks. But I don't know most of my gear actually was, you know, given to me or I have had for a while. So I didn't go on buy like the lightest, best gear. I don't know. I guess it just becomes like, it's what you own, and it's all you own out

> *Journal Notes*
>
> *Yoshi stood up, put on his pack and started walking around with his head down like he was in pain – his tone really changed and I could see a grimace on his face. He signaled every ounce of weight with his index finger, rubbed his knees like they were sore from hiking then paused, looked at me intensely and said "cause it's everyday man".*
>
> *He adjusted his packs straps, ran up the trail about 30 feet and hiked back down pretty fast, exaggerating the impact of his bouncing pack on his knees and back.*
>
> *He seemed quite proud of being given his equipment and even threw it around a bit – like that indicated he could survive without it*
>
> *June 10-06*

here, you know, it's like all you have. And so I don't complain about, you know, what's - I don't complain about what you don't have because, you know, that you have to carry it all. You don't usually want more and more stuff, like you don't have that consumer mentality except about food (27.1).

Snapper: I think I'm out here trying to become more independent and get used to being just being myself and being patient and appreciating what I have right now because things on the AT are a lot slower than they are at home, and at home I have a hard time not - always I'm looking for the next thing, like once I get graduated or once I do this, once I get this job then things will be better. And I forget to live in the, like remember that right now is also valuable and I'm hoping that being out here will help me learn to slow down and appreciate it, like…the right now (2.1).

In other cases the extraordinary became the ordinary and hence, was described in very different terms than previous accounts. Where previous accounts appeared to accept the ordinariness of daily hiking, the following excerpts contain a more pejorative sense of ordinary experiences. It is at this point the AT is sometimes given the moniker, 'The Green Tunnel', referring to the propensity of dense foliage with little to no vistas and where thru-hiking becomes simply a mundane event; sometimes a chore completed only one step at a time.

HeDeals: What's hard is, you know, to keep going, to climb up all these mountains and down all these mountains and up to these mountains and down to these mountains that's what's hard. Not being out here, you know, if you would be sitting on the spot like we are now for days it will be alright. You know, if you would stay in a shelter you would be fine, you wouldn't get attacked or, you won't starve, you had a full food bag or whatever. It is just like the hiking, you know, the grind, the daily grind to keep going, the perpetual thing you should, you know, that's what is difficult (10.1).

Shenanigans: I used to have a partner but she was just tired of - tired of hiking. She still loved nature and everything and still loved, like, to see things and it wasn't just like we were or she was lonely because we were meeting new people every day and stuff like that and - but just the physical activity of like hiking from place to place everyday got to her (20.1).

Creik: I think the trail is a whole bunch of little local trails that have been linked together. And I think that the people that maintain them and design them go to spots that they want to see, and as a thru-hiker you would say dammit why did they take me over this high ridge when I could have just gone around it because the view is not, you know, wasn't that great or whatever. But to the local who may be looking down on their farm or they may be looking down on their town. And so it's important to them that those overlooks are there whereas for us we will go, 'I have seen this a thousand times, big deal.' So I think it, I think the trail is a patch work of all these little local trails that just happen to link together (14.1).

In this converging point the seminal concept is the temporal focus of the thru-hiker on his/her experience. Regardless of expectations or suppositions of experience, that was emergent in the prior converging point, these excerpts allude to a focus on either the present or the future. This means that while some thru-hikers focused only on the immediate, while still engaging ordinary experiences, they were still accepted as such and were perceived as positive and part of a meaningful journey. I believe what is being expressed by Healds, Shannigans, and Creik is foci on the "long-haul" where they are facing many ordinary, mundane experiences for many days and weeks to come that is necessarily part of long-distance hiking.

4.2.2 Sojourning

It would seem intuitive that an Appalachian Trail thru-hiking experience is comprised of sojourning. However, this nuanced dimension is comprised of bounded and unbounded sojourning. Participants almost universally described the necessity of being bounded by the trail corridor in order to continue northward and finish a thru-hike. This would be obviously a truism as you can not hike the trail without physically being on the trail and yet many participants also described off-trail

experiences as being necessarily part of the thru-hiking experience. To the extent the AT traverses some small towns and hikers occasionally stop to re-supply food or repair equipment, all thru-hikers do, in fact, physically leave the trail corridor at various times. Nonetheless, some of them described the only way to move north was to stay within the trail corridor, having little contact with the 'outside world' whereas others talked about the only way to continue on the trail was to paradoxically move outside of the trail corridor for some periods of time. The later touches on the mental labor of thru-hiking and seeking respite from the grind mentioned earlier. This issue converges with a fiercely contested matter about what comprises a true thru-hike. While few would argue that taking 'zero days' (referring to the number of miles hiked) violates a thru-hike effort, many thru-hikers do subscribe to a puritan ethos of hiking the entire main, white-blazed[17] AT and at no time taking blue-blazed side trails (known as blue-blazing) which might provide a shorter or easier route. Taken to the extreme, some hikers would consider not returning to the exact spot after a 'hitched' ride into town to violate a thru-hike and there appears to be a general consensus with this ethos. The close proximity of the AT to many roads and towns allows trailheads to function as a sort of portal through which hikers can choose to be bounded or unbounded in their sojourn. Arguably, one could say a bounded sojourn is about the journey whereas the unbounded sojourn is about dwelling in the entire milieu of the Appalachian Trail including both corridor and outlying areas.

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[17] While the AT's official route is marked with white blazes, the ATC and supporting trail maintainers use blue blazes to mark side trails or alternate routes that are connected to the main route.

4.2.2.1 Bounded Sojourning

As part of bounded sojourning, thru-hikers experience the trail corridor itself. That is, the greenway corridor of publicly owned and easement lands that surround the footpath. In this way, the continuity of the trail plays a significant role in providing a kind of guarantee to hikers by guiding them along their long distance hike.

Nefa: Something that I am learning on the trail is like… is just take it blaze by blaze, you know. It's nice because the trail's all marked out in white blazes and, you know, it kind of guides you along. And for a while there I was thinking, man it'd be great if life had just white blazes throughout it that way I would know where I'm going, I would know this is the right way and I wouldn't be so stressed about making wrong decisions. And if I ever had questioned it, all you have to go is a couple yards up and I'd see another white blaze. It was just like, you know, just follow the white blaze in front of you. And you know eventually which direction you are going just trust the trail blazers and for me it's just like to trust that God is guiding you in the right path. And you are going to end up where you are supposed to end up, if we just follow like blaze by blaze (5.2).

Old Goat: Yeah, it was like, I mean, kind of funny when I - one of the first pictures I took way back in Georgia, I took the picture of a white blaze and I captioned it 'that's the boss' – but I like this boss. That's the only one who has to tell me what to do, follow me. Yeah, because it's like if it goes, you know, up and down and it goes around ridges and it goes to the top of the mountain where there is no view, you know, that's what it's going to do, you know, so you have to hike it. It doesn't really matter; you don't have a boss who's yellin' at you or whatever you just follow (4.2).

Doc: I don't know how some of those western trails, I mean, hikers on like the PCT or CDT do it. There's like, little to no markings, let alone blazes like on the AT. Here at least we don't have to worry about wayfinding and I think that's so much better, instead of constantly looking at my map or compass or whatever, I can enjoy the trail, or the wildlife, or just nature around me and that makes it so easy out here (18.2).

Within this corridor there is a loose network of social guidelines guided by the axiom 'hike your own hike'. However, these hikers also allude to the confinement of

bounded sojourning as a way to escape the demands of everyday life and a

reassurance that comes by staying within the clearly-defined demarcations that

structure the trail corridor. This means that within the previously mentioned ethos

and others, such as Leave-No-Trace ethics, etc., there is a collective resistance to

dictating how one goes about their respective thru-hike. Nevertheless, there are some

thru-hikers who firmly believe that in maintaining a pure thru-hike involves as little

interaction with civilization as possible.

Sidestep: Every thru-hiker has his mantra for thru-hiking and most of the time it's
'hike your own hike', and a lot of the problems are with the people doing what's
called yellow blazing and blue blazing and calling themselves thru-hikers - those that
are labeled as the Trail Nazis try to keep thru-hiking as the pure hiking of the old days
where you don't go into town for every little thing but stay out here and rough it –
that's the point, isn't it? (21.2).

Perhaps most obvious, participants talked of how moving continually was

important in order to reach Mount Katahdin, Maine, and without constant northward

progress, the destination seemed out of reach. However, for some hikers the

enormous effort of completing the trail seemed to keep them from making any forays

to places not essential to their journey.

Greyfox: We were talking about doing the 40 mile challenge, which is just the last 40
miles, you know, into Damascus from Watauga Lake in a day, and that way we could
make up a few days and crash in Damascus, get a shower and some good food (16.2).

Andy Dufresne: I went to the post office in Pearisburg and my package hadn't come
yet and I came back the next day, I didn't eat anything all day except for some lady
had given me some biscuits and some ham, ham and biscuits at the hostel and I –
that's all I had to eat for like a day and a half. I was so hungry and I went the next day
and my package shouldn't have been there; maybe three days ahead of schedule and it
shouldn't have been there for maybe for five more days but it just came in. And I

asked the lady, she said no, but the box she was checking in had my name on the side of it and I was like, that's my box - that's my box, she said, yeah, bet you're eager to have that, I said that's got - it's got my livelihood in there. I hated having to wait around like that, I just want to go north and get back on schedule (26.2).

These last two excerpts are but a brief example of the enormous mental and physical task involved in hiking 3500 continuous kilometers. The participants represented here suggest a constant impulsion to "make up miles" or "get back on the trail" and remain within the trail corridor as integral to relieving the urge. Hence, this converging point evokes bounded sojourning as comprised of physical, social and mental aspects.

4.2.2.2 Unbounded Sojourning

While bounded sojourning comprised staying within the trail corridor, to whatever extent, unbounded sojourning thru-hikers suggested a more relaxed approach to a thru-hike; one in which hikers dwell in the entire milieu of the AT. This milieu comprises the trail corridor but just as importantly it comprises outlying areas of interest. Notably, the AT traverses several trail towns along its route however, this dwelling refers more to a continual inclination towards hikers getting off trail to visit sites and engage in activities of interest. Trail Days, an annual hiker festival in Damascus, Virginia attracts hundreds of hikers. Many thru-hikers will get off the trail hundreds of miles from Damascus and hitchhike to and from the festival. Additionally, the numerous trailheads along the AT corridor are welcome portals through which hikers can easily access this outlying milieu. Nonetheless, for these

unbounded sojourners, the trail seems to always beckon them back albeit in a much

more relaxed approach.

Conductor: When you are up on top of the hill and you see a town, you're like, oh cold beer and you start to think about pizza. Or you say to yourself, "You know, I am out of cheese, I need more Gatorade mix or something" there is always a small little need in there. And it's not always just to throw down and party but sometimes I'm a little low on something. They're usually wants more than they are needs. But I figure, I'm out here earning it, I earned it, let's go get a beer (22.2).

Tortoise: I wouldn't miss trail days for anything. I don't know how I'm getting there but I'll find a ride and get back. It's too much fun to miss, hey – its part of the adventure, right? I wouldn't miss it just like I'm going to make sure I go into DC for a couple days and New York City. You can easily hitch and then catch a train or bus (3.2).

Boulder: I have to be careful, you know, with all these easy access points, or I'll never make it to Katahdin. The temptation to meet up with my friends or just check out this or that and then get back on trail – it's all good. I don't know, like if I was coming through here and there was no road to cross then I'd have to just keep going. But this way, I'm going to take a few days, hitch into town and catch a bus to go visit my girlfriend (9.2).

Swiss Miss: It's hard to say no to zeros as well, they're definitely enjoyable and you know - you know, I don't think I would have really changed anything. Maybe - maybe a little less partying in town because I - its hard to say no to the partying, but I know I could use the rest. But no, I don't think I'd change anything (17.2).

Hinesfeet: But we had that angst too. At least, I have that angst every time we are in a town but anywhere not on the trail, I feel angst like…You want to get back on the trail, okay? Just easier out here.

Energizer Bunny: I feel it's much more balanced now, that it's thinning out a little bit. There is definitely a lot of times in say like Irvine, Tennessee or Damascus where I was getting stir crazy by about a third zero day.

To be sure, the angst expressed by participants like Hinesfeet and Energizer

Bunny refers to the desire to physically be on the trail, in the natural environment,

away from civilization and continue hiking but without the impulsion expressed in bounded sojourning narratives. As a result, unbounded sojourning represents a broader view of the trail, its environment, and the AT experience. For these individuals, experiencing the entire milieu that can be accessed through trailhead portals only enhances their overall thru-hiking experience.

4.2.3 Kinship

Kinship can most conspicuously connote an anthropological relation. However, it also alludes to a close connection by a community of interests. For the research participants, kinship was mostly associated with other people in the trail community. Most thru-hikers embrace the social aspects of AT thru-hiking however, other hikers seek only their natural surroundings and continue alone, interacting very little with others. The later kind of kinship suggests the thru-hiker is sequestered in the sense that the hiker prefers the solitude of the trail corridor only to connect with his/her natural environs and usually avoids the social milieu of thru-hiking. Of course, even these hikers come in contact with other hikers as does the reciprocal and hence, I do not intend a bifurcation between sequestered and social but only to illustrate the intent and hence, dialectic of this dimension.

4.2.3.1 Sequestered Kinship

Whereas social kinship was most often described in terms of other people, the elements of sequester were described as merely wanting to be isolated in nature to experience solitude as a way to a simple existence. This perspective was expressed

by only a few participants and appears to comprise a minority of thru-hikers.

Nevertheless, this experience is sought after vigorously, if only because it is in the

minority. To be sure, thru-hikers seeking only sequestered kinship are keenly aware

of their surroundings and take certain measures to ensure their solitude.

Hinesfeet: There are definitely different schools though. There are some that just kind of, there is some that aren't into the social thing, they just kind of hike on, you know, you see them once or twice, like that…(1.3).

Yoshi: I started out solo well and, you know, I knew that there would be people here I knew, I knew I'd would meet people and so forth but - and I'm still pretty much solo. You know, you meet people and then you move on and then you meet more, you know, and if you wanted to be completely by yourself, it's really not a problem with that either. You know, you don't have to say in a shelter you can put your tent in the woods you can, you know, see people and say hello but you can still make it solitary, it's really whatever you want to do with it (27.3).

Caboose: Yeah, it's a really long trail, but it's very narrow, so - but there is always a place like Walkabout was saying, you can always find solitude all you have to do is walk into the woods and there you are, you know, I mean it is always there, even on the trail. It is like you just go, you find voids you can stick in them and then you go find groups and have that too but only for a short time (13.3).

Doc: I wouldn't want to say it in front of her but I definitely feel a little bit of relief now that I'm running solo. Like it's definitely easier to just, you know, there is less planning - you just do what you want to do (18.3).

To the extent that sequestered hikers avoided most interaction with other

hikers, they sought interaction with their natural environs. This emerged as a

conscious purpose throughout their hike. In addition, other hikers not actively

seeking solitude could still experience solitude but also expressed a differentiation

from sequestered hikers.

4.2.3.2 Social Kinship

Perhaps the most commonly discussed point by thru-hikers was the social

kinship that developed along the trail. Growing out of the high numbers of

northbound thru-hikers, many participants described the social aspects of thru-hiking

as the most important to their overall experience. Some of them described the trail

community where so many people from different backgrounds seemingly have so

much in common when sharing the trail. These elements make social kinship a kind

of loosely knit fabric of Appalachian Trail aficionados that provide a level of support

and safety for some and uplifting fun for others.

Greyfox: I kind of came out for the social, I wasn't, we were kind of kicking around about it earlier -- I didn't come out to find God or find myself or discover something that I am hiding or anything, we just we love to hike (16.3).

Brother Thomas: I thought I was going to come out here and it was going to be a catharsis. I had just quit my job and I wanted to get that out of my system. And I thought it would just be me in the woods for a long time and it's not it at all, and I am very happy about it (23.3).

Chou-chou: I started out with someone I'm trying to hook up with. When we started the trail together, I thought it was just going to be the two of us. The first night in the shelter there was like 20 people there, I was like, oh this is great but I am sure I am never going to see them again and he was one of them and I just never realized there will be such a family out here. And it made my trip, honestly. So, if I had known that before, I don't know if I would have started the trail (11.3).

Snail: And when you lose your group, it kind of sucks for a while until you meet new people - you know, so I guess that's about it. Because like there are times when you just really need to be around other people. Like if you hike by yourself for like four days and you don't see anybody you start to get a little weird (7.3).

Energizer Bunny: I probably wouldn't go out to, you know, Alaska and hike by myself, whereas I would definitely, you know, I mean I was scared when I started off

this trail but I adapted very well, partially because there were so many other people around me. I knew that I didn't really have to fear those people, you know (24.3).

Poles: Yeah, we're all in the same boat too, even us all here, we're all different ages, but everybody is in the same boat and kind of - everybody is doing the same thing. So, you make friends with people you wouldn't think you'd make friends with or would be friendly, you know, 19 year olds to, you know, 81 year olds. All in the same boat and same goals and all the best of friends. It's pretty impressive; you don't usually see in the outside world (15.3).

Tortoise: I have kind of called it a 2000 mile moving party, because it kind of is like 6 months of spring break but harder. I found that there are just people all over the place. They are fun to hang out with, fun to be around. We just want to socialize more than I thought we would. I think a lot of it, I mean this - the social scene is so important. I mean, I have been in towns where I feel almost like a celebrity like, you know, in Hot Springs, I know half the people I see because they are all thru-hikers. You know, and the other half really want to talk to the thru-hikers and know that I am a thru-hiker and that means something to them, you know. It's the point when I went off trail I felt like I was incognito. You know that no one knew I was a thru-hiker and it was - it was weird, you know, interacting with people who didn't know that (3.3).

Sidestep: There is a giant thru-hiker community. It's a huge gossip community that has created its own jargon and own lingo to a ridiculous degree. It's not even a community, it's more of an occupational group because you can categorize - every thru-hiker knows that there are different types of thru-hikers, they are labeled as such as trail hippies, trail trash, thrill seekers, and the retirees, you know, there is the people who have money, the people who don't, the people who want to do something before they die, people seeking a legacy, the people don't have anything better to do otherwise, they loose their job, so they go to the trail. Everyone is out there for a different reason…(21.3).

Sumo: Yeah, that's the thing the trail does for you. You can hike all day by yourself and make new friends and meet up with them in the evening, and just have fun and talk. No, I am glad, I am definitely glad at the end of the day, when my trail family is there and they are like, "hey, how is it going" (19.3).

Snapper: I think family has like been one of the biggest things that I have discovered. My AT experience has been about the fellow hikers and you meet them and its not - they are not strangers, you know automatically, like this whole community of people kind of have like a common thread of mentality about openness,

you know, and I think that's pretty unique to the AT that also you won't find like on the PCT, you know, that kind of…community (2.3).

Many others talked extensively about trail magic, a phenomenon unique in itself, where the generous hospitality of strangers is given in sincerity, received with openness and usually appears serendipitously timed. Often it is manifested in an anonymous trailside cooler of cold drinks and snacks but also can be free rides of long distances or other acts of kindness.

Walkabout: Well, Albert Mountain, which was really great and then that Super Dome tent. We had this super - this place - this trail is totally magic! We had a night we were camping with our two friends and we were like talking about moonshine and how great moonshine is and we would like to try it and then we were talking about the movie the Big Lebowski…and how great it will be to see the movie. And then of course we are talking about how great, how much we love food. So, we come into this gap and here is this humongous tent set up. And they had, they had food set up, it was some guys from an outfitter in Ohio. We got there like ten in the morning; we didn't leave until like ten the next morning and we had three good hardcore meals. We watched the Big Lebowski on a big screen, drank moonshine - in the tent, drank moonshine and it was just -- it was just perfect. It was great. And then we got slack packed…for 22 miles…and then the guy slackin' us from the trail magic, he met us at the half-way point of our slack pack and offered us, had cool drinks and more water (12.3).

Rootstepper: Past thru-hikers, Gatorade and Fishin' Fred, back in Georgia had excellent trail magic. They had setup this huge like round saw blade they got from a - from an antique store or something. And they - they are taking the saw blade and welded - welded chains to it and then attached the chains to like a tripod that was fitted over a fire. And so it's like a big saw blade skillet. And they would make like quesadillas and pan cakes and everything on that and they have a huge like 12 person tent that people would stay in the night and could stay in. And the spot they chose it was like a 100 yards away from down the trail. There was a lookout and that was really nice to go out there at night, because you could see towns from the distance and what not. So that was incredible trail magic, like the North Carolina and Tennessee border there was a note saying there was trail magic down the road in this gap. So we walked down the road and came to this log cabin and uh, and went inside in and there was past thru-hikers Hercules and FAL which was short for free at last. And they

really did it up. They were making like breakfast burritos and waffles. It is all fresh made bread and hot cider. I mean it was ridiculous. So that was really like some of the breakfast items then for lunch they had pulled-pork sandwiches, and roast beef sandwiches. And this was all served like back-to-back. They were like, "What do you want for breakfast?" And as soon as you are done, "What do you want for lunch?" and then like okay, "What do you want for dessert?" And dessert was Banana Split Sundaes or Fudge Browning Sundaes and FAL really did a good job like this was something that would come out of the ice cream shop or something and she had all the right dishes, you know nice perfect scoops and everything (6.3).

These transcript excerpts describe a planned and organized form of trail magic which, although is in stark contrast to much simpler forms, is typically well-received by thru-hikers. Those providing such splendid fare are perceived by thru-hikers as part of the community and, in some cases, these 'trail magic camps' become an annual affair. On occasion though, participants expressed a general preference for simpler, unplanned forms of trail magic where a single cooler with a cold drink was a welcome sight but no sign of provider was around. Hence, participants expressed a desire to thank those responsible but respected that they were not present to be given credit. In short, all forms and manifestations of trail magic contribute to social kinship in thru-hiking.

4.2.4 Wild Imbrication

This dimension reflects the deep significance that thru-hiking experiences have on thru-hikers. For many participants, a thru-hiking experience was much more than a temporary recreational activity; rather it became a way of learning about the ecology of their lived experience, indeed, their own existence. This learning was usually perceived through an increased sensorial awareness of and relatedness with

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the hikers' ecological imbrication or merging. However, to the extent that the other

three dimensions were easily elicited through the interview dialog, this dimension

emerged more from the nexus of embodied dialog in the ecologically-active

interviews. Moreover, this oftentimes tacit dimension as a process of becoming or

increasing awareness includes the dialectic of alterity and parity.

4.2.4.1 Alterity

Alterity, or the otherness of nature, is a converging point of many meaning

units that describe how hikers strive to not only survive nature, or 'be prepared for the

worst she'll throw at you', but are quite concerned about facing the harsh elements

during a thru-hike. In this way, participants seemed aware of their inherent ecology

but not resolved to embrace it – a kind of superficial imbrication. Nature was seen as

the Other and they must survive it. Dissimilitude with nature is central to this idea as

well as an associated meaning in that some participants view themselves as

conquering the trail and as such a thru-hike was no more than a physical challenge.

Quite often these hikers relied heavily on an overabundance of equipment to aid them

in any foreseeable circumstance which was commonly quipped among thru-hikers as

– The size of your pack is equal to the size of your fear.

Energizer Bunny: But, you know, for me its more, more of a challenge, it's a six month challenge. To see if I can - tomorrow will I feel the same way that I feel today? Am I happy? Do I have those days when I am going to say; dammit I want to quit or do I have those days when I say, I will just keep going and going and going! (24.4).

Miss Parkay: But there is this girl, Butterfly, who passed me last week, she started out with a partner and the partner turned out to be terrible for like, a big smoker and

just not in physical shape whatsoever and so Butterfly left her and has been hiking like huge miles like one day she showed up at the shelter at like 2 PM and had already done 19 or something like that. But she is of the mentality where she is not enjoying it. She doesn't really like the trail experience or anything like that, but I guess her personality is such as she doesn't want to be quitter. So, she would rather just get this over with as soon as possible (8.4).

Sidestep: It's all about the physical challenge. If it was a cakewalk, everyone would be out here doing it. Yeah, I was kind of planning to do the big miles and I did, you know, all the way and I was putting in more than 150 a week, 160 a week from the - I guess from somewhere in the middle of Georgia, all the way until now. I think my, my shortest day - my shortest day was 19 miles. And my longest day was 40 to 41. Started with a 55 - 60 pound pack. And I was averaging, killing myself doing 3 miles per hour in some places, especially through the Smokies. I did the Smokies in 3 days, now it's just about 45 pounds. But I don't think about the weight, so much. Usually it's the challenge, when you feel the weight on your back, tugging at your shoulders, making your shoulders sore, it's a challenge - you know, I just wanted to get to the top of this hill and you don't look around, you just, you look at the ground, most of the time and your head stays down (21.4).

> *Journal Notes - Sidestep*
>
> *He seemed really into his gear so when I asked what made his pack so heavy he emptied the entire contents on the ground and proceeded to tell me every detail like his '1.1 oz. sil-nylon tarp that's exactly 7 by 9, GPS, Pocketmail and cell phone' so that he's always prepared. But referring to his apparent lack of fear he also talked about how ultralighters are too close to danger with not enough gear. He never did say how many daily miles he was now covering and never mentioned anything about enjoying his hike.*
>
> *June 4-06*

For some participants the alterity of the trail environment is expressed in terms of encountering different expectations like certain wildlife or grand vistas.

Andy Dufresne: I haven't seen any bears yet, like the only animal that has attacked has been a grouse. They came fluttering out off the side of the trail. But I lost my

glasses for a while, so that was difficult, I feel like may be I missed all the bears I was going to see while I didn't have my glasses…I like asking locals, you know, because I keep seeing deer and I was like, 'so when can I see the deer with big antlers?' and what not and they told me that's only in the winter...I think I might be more observant of my surroundings on shorter trips, because I think here I would definitely like pressing on at a good pace, and sometimes everything might move by too quickly almost…But still, you know, I want to get into big mile days even though I try to stop at the overlooks and vistas as long as possible (26.4).

4.2.4.2 Parity

Conversely, parity is the realization of similitude in nature resulting in

harmony and synergy. Even though there is a realization, it remains at an oftentimes

tacit level where the thru-hiker knows it, feels it, but cannot verbalize it. Participants

often described the realization of how reliant they were on their environment for

safety. Instead of conquering the landscape, a thru-hike was seen as cooperating with

the landscape in an ecological, interactive relationship. In this converging point there

was an autopoesis or rewilding of the thru-hiker that helped him/her to 'read' the

landscape more accurately through various senses.

Boulder: I've come to realize that thru-hiking sometimes means more about being in touch with nature and knowing where and when to go and what to do versus just having the right gear. Like I used to be obsessed with getting in miles but now if it's dangerous out with like lightening, I'll wait it out instead of taking chances. I'm not avoiding hiking in the rain because you'd never get done but I'm more in tune with the elements, it's like working together (9.4).

Swiss Miss: I hate my gear, like half the stuff I have doesn't work. My bag doesn't keep me warm. This is my third pair of shoes. My pack doesn't fit me, so I am still learning. I thought I knew what I am doing out here. I don't - I have no idea, two months into it I still don't know…so it's been a rough seven weeks - first seven weeks just putting on my shoes, my shoes. I was getting Achilles problems. So I was struggling with it seven weeks. So I don't have the right gear then my body hurts. So,

it's really tough, but now I am better. Things are a lot better and I'm getting by okay. I'm adapting (17.4).

Nefa: At first I worried about things, you know, what I would smell like and I carried deodorant and I carried…I carried soap; I got rid of all those things. I got rid of all those things, the only thing I switched up to I added camp shoes because I didn't have those and I added a - I switched my alcohol stove for my pocket rocket because I wanted to eat a hot breakfast and it takes too long to cook with an alcohol stove in the morning. And that's the only way I ever added any weight. Other than that I first - actually I - first I carried a bug spray and I carried a - a sun block (5.4).

Poles: I can't really describe it, but I feel more aware of things around me. Like, that [signals the sounds of birds] and then it's quiet…and then you hear something, a lot of trees are rubbing against each other and make creaks and you know, you will turn around and you think you have heard something different and you hear the creak again and that's how I know things are okay. It's like I recognize the sound of nature in its daily walk just like mine (15.4).

> *Journal Notes*
>
> *After signaling the birds, she seemed all at once to heighten her senses, tilting her head into the breeze. It was like she was listening for something – a kind of message that was there but just waiting to be heard.*
>
> *May 25-06*

Pumpkin: I'm not really out here for the views, like the views are awesome but I'm not - I guess it kind of depends on the reason why you are out here like if you are only out here to see good views then it's probably not a good reason to hike the whole thing (25.4).

Greyfox: You might think this sounds crazy but I feel like everything inanimate talks to me – not literally – but in a way, I don't know because it's the little things like when the flowers started to bloom and like that totally changed my mood like…Song birds in the morning. Yeah, hearing birds and stuff like that is what – the Owls are so cool. [Starts enacting] If I'm walking like this then I'm way more aware of smells and sounds versus being weighted down and all I'm thinking about

> *Journal Notes*
>
> *Greyfox backs up and begins walking lightly which doesn't appear to slow him down. This becomes apparent when he refers to being previously weighed down by a heavier pack he used to carry.*
>
> *He alludes to being more in tune with his surroundings when he isn't carrying as much gear and subsequently isn't distracted by the weight.*
>
> *May 26-06*

is how much my feet are screaming at me, that's how it used to be but I don't need that much stuff anymore (16.4).

Tortoise: My senses have gotten really like, noises like that bird which I don't know, just all sorts of noises, they are really, really distinct. So, whenever I get to like a big highway or a big road it's a little overwhelming and I didn't think that would happen. Out here every noise has such a distinct sound whereas when you are in the city or even in a small town that you go into to re-supply they are so - so noisy (3.4).

Healds: This is all we are [picks up soil]. Now some might not like that but the longer you're out here the more you realize we're all the same stuff – it just takes some hikers longer than some to see it – it not a bad thing in fact…its real, its substance (10.4).

Journal Notes
He grabs handful of soil and sifts it through his fingers, rubbing it into his hands. You can tell he is comfortable with the earth. I don't think he means we're dirt in the sense of not worth anything but only that we're made of the earth - like dust to dust…
May 19-06

Similar to the dimension of Perseity, where some extraordinary experiences morphed into ordinary over time, Wild Imbrication emerged as a process where many thru-hikers see themselves as anatopistic when initially on the AT. However, throughout the course of a thru-hike, many participants expressed the shift in their own views with an increasing awareness of how he/she is ecologically experiencing the trail with every step.

4.3 FINAL COMMENTS

In this chapter I have illustrated four dimensions – Perseity, Sojourning, Kinship, and Wild Imbrication – that emerged from the empirical explication process

of participant interview transcripts. These findings address one objective of this dissertation: *To provide an ecophenomenological account of experiential recreation in the context of thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail.* While explicating each dimension, in addition to my initial interpretation, I have endeavored to let these texts 'speak' for themselves thereby giving voice to dominant and privileged as well as marginalized experiences of AT thru-hikers. By employing ecophenomenology to the study of thru-hikers' experiences, many nuanced and dialectical meanings emerged to form the four broad dimensions as the operative essence of an Appalachian Trail thru-hiking experience. As such, the operative essence in this study is based not on phenomenological intentionality but on ecophenomenological relationality.

Of particular interest in these findings is the prevalence of ordinary, quotidian experiences that comprise an essential component of thru-hiking. To the extent that ordinary experiences are, according to Turner (1986) mere experiences, and extraordinary experiences comprise 'an experience' that is, they stand out from the ordinary, these findings suggest that both are meaningful. Perhaps more precisely, just as some extraordinary experiences evolved into ordinary, it appears the reciprocal is true in that some mundane activities can have a profound impact on a thru-hiker. This finding is not indicative of simply the intentionality of consciousness but of the relationality and reversibility of the flesh, whose dehiscence is seen in the inseparable and overlapping nature of the dialectical converging points. Moreover, the

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intertwined nature of dimensions is highlighted through the dialectical notion in Perseity that many thru-hikers perceive their experiences as ecologically self-sufficient and in Wild Imbrication many thru-hikers perceptions are grounded in ecological interdependence.

Taken alone, I believe these findings could be useful to AT managers who are mandated with overseeing the elements of an Appalachian Trail experience. For instance, managers may be surprised to find that hiking alone and seeking solitude was not part of many research participants' experience. Indeed, the trail community of thru-hikers, formed through close social bonding, was of particular importance to many participants. In Chapter 1 (see p. 3) I outlined the AT experience as mandated which, in my reading, is not fully indicative of the actual experiences of thru-hikers as explicated in this chapter. As a result, the complexity and value of these findings may only be realized by further investigating the colonization of thru-hikers' experiences. To this end, the transition from this chapter to the next may be seen as a more distinct movement from pre-reflective experiences of thru-hikers to reflective where the flux of ideological negotiation is evidenced.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS – DECOLONIZING THRU-HIKING EXPERIENCES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I address the second half of my intentions set out in objective 1 for this study: *To critically examine the concept of experience and experiential derivatives commonly found in outdoor recreation literature **and the extent to which these are related to actual thru-hiker experiences***. To the extent that Chapters 2 and 3 critically examined experiential recreation at the theoretical level, this chapter's intent is to extend the conceptual to the lived experiences of research participants. Furthermore, whereas in Chapter 4 I illustrated the dimensions that emerged from the ecophenomenological explication process, in this chapter I employ a decolonization process by locating tensions in the narratives of thru-hikers which suggest the infusion of wilderness ideology. This decolonization process is realized through the combined use of ecophenomenology and post-colonial theory. Post-colonial theory continues to provide the heuristic through which ideology is revealed whereas ecophenomenology's unique perspective considers experience in light of the full range of *Erlebnis*. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to examine individual narratives in light of a post-colonial inquiry of the wilderness ideology and how participants negotiate the infusion of ideology at different modes of lived experience. The illustration and interpretation of specific excerpts are presented from various interview texts.

Building on the emergent dimensions that form the operative essence of a thru-hiking experience, the findings in this chapter reveal the colonization of wilderness ideology on thru-hiker's experiences. While some participants spoke critically of the received idea of wilderness thereby allowing them a different, if not personal, conception of wilderness experience, many participants expressed ideas compatible with the received idea while their actual experiences were in opposition. To be sure, my questioning to this end was not to challenge their perceptions but to explore the apparent but yet unrealized cognitive dissonance[18]. Throughout the interviewing process I noticed several participants recognizing this tension within their own narratives but not to the extent of modifying existing beliefs. Nevertheless, many of these participants drew on alternative meanings of wilderness that implicitly challenged traditional perspectives of wilderness and the tensions within their own accounts. The tensions emerged during the ecophenomenological portion of the preceding explication process as well as direct questioning about wilderness and the AT with questions such as, "What is wilderness to you?" and "Do you think there is any wilderness experience on the AT?" Consequently, I present these findings in two sections. The first section focuses directly on the tensions evident in participants' conceptions of wilderness and wilderness experiences in the context of thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail. The second section draws from the emergent dimensions in

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[18] I suggest cognitive dissonance not in the way it has been used according to expectancy theory as a psychological mechanism in a linear experiential sequence but simply as the incompatibility of two cognitions.

Chapter 4 and focuses on the plausibility of a wilderness continuum that is considered according to an experiential continuum. In addition, a third section is offered to discuss the issue of ecoliteracy that became apparent in many participant interviews.

5.2 THE INFLUENCE OF IDEOLOGY

As part of Chapter 2, I deliberated on the ideology of wilderness and the extent to which that ideology has been intertwined with the symbolic stature of the Appalachian Trail. In order to appropriately address this issue, I first treat the extent of wilderness ideology in general conceptions and then specific to the AT in order to understand the associated nuances. These two sub-sections illustrate the pervasiveness of ideological views of wilderness held by AT thru-hikers and the tension this creates as compared to the actual experiences outlined in Chapter 4.

5.2.1 Wilderness Ideals

When asked about their personal views, many participants described wilderness in terms of essential elements so as to qualify it whereas others used wilderness areas as examples even though they had never previously visited. The sub-headings below capture the range of wilderness ideals expressed by the research participants and are indicative of other research seeking user perspectives of wilderness (cf. Hall, 2001; Kendra & Hall, 2000; Loeffler, 2004; Patterson et al. 1998; Pohl et al., 2000).

5.2.1.1 Remoteness

Remoteness was usually the first element described and was expressed most often as a tangible quality. This included the distance from civilization such as towns, roads and other developments making access difficult but it also meant the size of an area of land thereby creating a feeling of remoteness. This feeling of remoteness suggested a sense of risk in being physically remote.

Nefa: To me, wilderness is being a long, long way away from town or even any roads, like, it's gotta be a long trip back to give you the idea you're a long way from anywhere (5.5).

Healds: Wilderness is remote, um…I mean in being remote its got no roads where you can just drive in and get to isolated areas…otherwise it wouldn't be remote…and I mean no ATV's either, those damn things take the remoteness from any wilderness area, like what's the point if you can just drive all across the place (10.5).

Poles: I think it's a big open area, I mean it can have trees and all but it's got to be largely a large area so that you're not like, right next to the road or something else built up where it's easy access or something (15.5).

Miss Parkay: It's kind of scary when it's that remote but that's the way it's got to be if its wilderness, it's supposed to be like that (8.5).

For participants expressing remoteness, it is important to remember this is a wilderness ideal. Moreover, the ideals as represented in these excerpts, although tantamount to defining wilderness, lacked any specific reference to *de jure* wilderness in terms of actual distances or measurements. To be sure, wilderness as defined by legislation attempts to define physical measurements and, as a result, buffer outside influences. Hence, as an ideal, physical remoteness remains only a vague concept or, put differently, being physically remote is basically a mental and social construction.

5.2.1.2 Lack of Human Influence

Interview participants also described wilderness largely in terms of the lack of

human influence. This was illustrated by both the absence of other people and the

absence of human impacts as a physical place preserved in an untouched condition.

This element is most reminiscent of the philosophical discussion regarding the

received view's 'pristine' nature.

Yoshi: Wilderness areas are places where man hasn't been and that's why we've
protected them, so that they'll stay that way. It's like here in the east we've been
everywhere but that's why there's more wilderness out west, cause we've not been
everywhere and we protected them from development before people ruined them
(27.6).

Pumpkin: If I went to Alaska in the middle of say, Gates of the Artic, then I'd be in
wilderness with no people and no roads so that it's in its untouched state. I guess
there are places where people haven't disturbed nature out west as well but when I
think of wilderness it's definitely a place where you don't see all these impacts of
man. I know people go there but you don't see fire rings or like…if there were those
then it's not wilderness anymore (25.6).

Doc: People make it not wilderness. If there weren't people then it'd be more
wilderness…I guess it's all about the numbers of people because if you see people out
there then what's the difference to seeing people anywhere else? It'd be no different
and wilderness is supposed to be different from everything else we live. We don't
live in wilderness so it's definitely where people aren't (18.6).

Perhaps most relevant in this discussion of pristine wilderness is that the lack

of human influence is perceived as positive. Many participants expressed that they

feel most human influence results in a negative impact on the environment. Hence, in

addition to this view as misanthropic towards indigenes' influence on the land this

underlying wilderness ideal provides the impetus for many thru-hikers strict

adherence to Leave-No-Trace ethics.

5.2.1.3 Natural Features

Whereas the first two elements denoted wilderness in negative terms such as

the absence of civilization or human influence, participants also described wilderness

in terms of positive features. Most often this was expressed as seeing wildlife,

particularly large mammals, as well as natural features like trees, rocks, and water.

The later features were always described according to visual qualities as in scenic

vistas and connoted a sense of natural wonder and beauty.

Snapper: …like, if I was to wake up one morning and look out my tent so I could see
for miles, then I'd say that's wilderness (2.7).

Rootstepper: In wilderness you have the chance to see big game like big horn sheep
or mountain goats and elk or grizzly bears, like out west in wilderness areas or I guess
in Alaska you can see the caribou. Back here we've driven out all the big game but
then I guess there's still black bear and their supposed to be bringin' back the
mountain lion – like reintroducing it to the Appalachians. I guess there's deer but you
see them all the time – usually in wilderness you're supposed to see animals that you
can't see at other times (6.7).

Energizer Bunny: Old growth forest, that's wilderness because it's untouched and
that way the trees are the way it used to be – I guess you get that in some places still
but in the east, we've logged it all at least once (24.7).

Snail: When I'm in wilderness I like to take in all the vistas, they're awe-inspiring.
There's just something about seeing all that out there and you know it's wilderness.
Or when you see waterfalls, that's really special too. All those natural things that
make wilderness – wilderness (7.7).

The dominance of visual aesthetics is pertinent to this ideal. Even when

referring to large mammals, participants are expressing the desire to visually

experience wilderness. The visual experience also connotes as sense of the grand or largely romantic view of wilderness where participants envisage big game, big trees, big vistas and most any visual aesthetic that represents not only the alterity of the wilderness ideal but also a marginalized referent to divergent sensorial experiences.

5.2.1.4 Experiences

Perhaps most important to this study was the illustration of wilderness by experience. Many participants described wilderness in terms of the experiences it afforded them and of particular interest is the connotation that these experiences are peculiar to wilderness areas. Included in these descriptions are nuanced versions of solitude, escape, challenge and survival, each of which is commonly held in dominant, ideological notions of the wilderness experience.

Greyfox: Wilderness is a place of solitude, where you don't hear anything and can simply be alone. That's why we need wilderness so bad 'cause it's almost impossible to get solitude in nature anymore, like we've got our cell phone with us or MP3 players or whatever and wilderness you don't take those unless you don't want solitude but then I don't why you'd go seeking wilderness (16.8).

Hinesfeet: For me, its being still so that I can experience the solitude in wilderness. I think that's it part of the wilderness experience but you have to be still enough to experience it, I don't know if that makes any sense but that's what I try to do and that's what I think wilderness offers (1.8).

Andy Dufresne: Escape man! That's why I got my trail name – like from the movie the Shawshank Redemption. Just after that movie came out I was going on a hike to get away from a lot of stress in my life and I told everyone I was escaping from life to the wilderness. That's the great thing about wilderness, you can escape from life, go into the wilderness and nothing's the same – you can do whatever and just get away from it all (26.8).

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Tortoise: I think wilderness is good because it allows you a place to escape from the busyness of life. It there weren't wilderness areas I don't know where I'd go (3.8).

Old Goat: Wilderness is about challenge and pushing yourself to the limits – sometimes those limits mean survival, sometimes they mean adjusting things according to the environment but it's definitely a challenge to be in the wilderness. I can't imagine wilderness being wilderness without challenges. Like in wilderness you don't see paved trails or things like that because that takes out the challenge and what fun is going into the wilderness without the challenge of having to sometimes survive! (4.8).

Swiss Miss: I'm not a major like, adventure seeker or anything but I like some challenges and I think that's what wilderness gives you – whether the challenge is being away from other people or your job so that you get away from routine or it's the risk of something going wrong – wilderness definitely provides challenges you have to face (17.8).

As mentioned, these excerpts provide the standard dogma of wilderness ideology. Moreover, to the extent that this ideal suggests these experiences are peculiar to wilderness simply confirms the dominance and pervasiveness of colonizing conceptions of wilderness. In short, many participants colonized specific experiences to only occur within wilderness.

5.2.2 Appalachian Wilderness Ideals

When asked about wilderness and the Appalachian Trail participants tended to talk more about the lack of wilderness on the AT. Many participants expressed very specific details about why they do not consider the AT and wilderness as commensurable. In many ways these descriptions simply represented the converse of their own general wilderness ideals. To illustrate this the following excerpts are from one of the group interviews which provide an interesting dialog where four thru-

hikers are in accord with the supposed disparity between wilderness ideals and the

AT.

Boulder: This ain't wilderness. All the road crossings, all the noise, all of the - all of the shit and crap that people impact on the trail, I did not expect that at all. I am sure there is - there are wilderness areas. Smokies was pretty much so. I know New Hampshire and Maine will be but this isn't wilderness, this is, this the woods - this is the woods because everything - anything you need you can, you know, pretty much find at a road crossing or a town and go get it, so that…(9.9).

Healds: Wilderness is coming through here in December. Then it's wilderness. There's like a foot of snow and nobody has been around for weeks. The terrain becomes a lot more harder to negotiate. There is a lack of people and the roads, a lot more of them are closed - the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Shenandoah Skyline Drive (10.9).

Miss Parkay: Yeah, there's a lot of roads south of here which takes it definitely away from a challenge because this is more recreational than it is like survival (8.9).

Boulder: People back home, you know, they have no idea and I suppose, you know, originally when - at least when I started, when other people picture what it's like to walk the trail, you picture being a little bit more secluded and on your own and so forth, you know - you know, in the beginning, somewhat more of a survival experience than it really is…(9.9).

Chou-chou: Maybe it was wilderness once upon a time (11.9).

Healds: It was a lot more. Everything - all - everything we have walked through so far besides a couple pieces of forest have been harvested before time and time again, so it's not the same forest (10.9).

Miss Parkay: And you probably didn't see, you know, all the houses and all the factories and all the highways and all the other crap (8.9).

Healds: Yeah, all that encroachment, it's getting closer. It's been encroached on - what's wilderness, you know, to spend any time in Northern New England on the trail you are in wilderness. You know, I mean freakin' wilderness (10.9).

Boulder: Exactly, when I think wilderness, I think the 100 mile wilderness for some reason although I haven't been there yet (9.9).

At this point I think it is apropos and interesting to note the association of wilderness ideals with the 100 mile wilderness which is the northernmost 100 miles of AT from Monson, ME to Mount Katahdin. However, the 100 mile wilderness is wilderness in name only as it has been and is currently corporate woodland where the trail, although not passing any paved roads or communities for the distance, bisects numerous dirt logging roads and camps. The preceding group interview was conducted at Hog Camp Gap, Virginia and although these participants assert 'this ain't wilderness', at the intercept point they would have already hiked through 14 wilderness areas totaling 201 trail kilometers (125 trail miles) of *de jure* wilderness. Moreover, in the remaining 2214 km (1376 miles) of these participants' thru-hike they will have passed through only six more *de jure* wilderness areas including none in Maine. These kinds of tensions between wilderness and the AT become more obvious and explicit in the following excerpts.

Shenanigans: I thought it'd be kind of a bit harder to get in contact with civilization and with towns and stuff out here, like you pick up the phone and call or you cross roads all of the time, and you don't get to just be in the woods for a long time and feel like you are really in the woods, which is kind of good 'cause it makes it easier to come out here and makes more people able to come out here but it's not like big open wilderness…and there is not much old forest out here (20.9).

Caboose: I wouldn't say we are really like out in the middle of no where particularly. We are definitely up in the mountains, but it - I wouldn't say remote - remote is not an adjective I would use for the Appalachian Trail. It's kind of remote like out there but it's close enough that you can get back in, if something goes wrong and I guess that's good. You know, there is - there is lots of days where I will pass close enough by roads and I'll hear trucks and cars and everything like that. But it is still really nice though, it's still, you know, these areas were all set-up as wilderness so they are try to

be as undeveloped as possible. And I like that a lot. I guess some people get really like, they feel like spiritual connections with being out in the woods, because that's like brings them closer to God and everything, because it's undeveloped and untouched by man. But I am not very spiritual like that. I just know that, I definitely feel like a connection with nature and all of that here (13.9).

Old Goat: I have done a lot more camping in New York State's Adirondacks where you do go away and you get out of - you go into the wilderness. Where here we cross roads and as we are crossing roads, I feel less in the wilderness, because we are just constantly crossing roads and going through towns and stuff. But it has that wilderness experience, because we are out in the - out in the woods and the outdoors, in the forests. So, a little bit of both, I think, probably the Smokies has got a little bit more wilderness, because it was one long stretch out there (4.9).

Sumo: I don't feel that this is quite the wilderness experience that I did expect. Like there is times when you are totally isolated and then like, two minutes later there is, you know, power lines or something. So, yeah, I wouldn't necessarily say, this is a wilderness experience, I mean I guess it is to some extent…and here like, there is definitely been times where especially in the beginning with the snow and it was way more dangerous, you know, with just temperatures and hypothermia and all that stuff. I don't know, this is more wilderness than I have ever been in but I - it's not like we are in Alaska. It's not - it has more people you know, so it's not quite like the quintessential wilderness (19.9).

Probing deeper into these issues I asked about AT wilderness history in general and pointedly about Benton MacKaye, the most prominent historical figure who is known as the father of the Appalachian Trail. I mentioned he was a wilderness advocate who wrote extensively on Appalachian Trail wilderness and questioned participants regarding his polemical assertion, "The Appalachian Trail is a wilderness trail or it is nothing". Many participants responded in a manner of defense of the Appalachian Trail and wilderness suggesting more tensions within the following narratives.

Conductor: That's a strong statement but like everything you get a metamorphosis away from, you know, the true theory versus what actually it became and…there are those wilderness portions, but there are, you know, being so darn close to the roads that, you know, you don't get it. Here is a good example, they say the Smoky Mountains is the number one national park visited. 90-something % don't even step out of their car, though we got to see that part of the wilderness, and so in that respect the Appalachian Trail does have, you know, you do get into that wilderness experience, and here too, I mean a lot of people we do see a day hiker that might go up to some vista or somewhere, but again I would say, you know, of the Blue Ridge Parkway, they probably - whatever the percentage is I bet higher eighties or above that never get out of their cars. So we are seeing a different sector of what's out there than the majority of people that say they have been to these places (22.9).

Hinefeet: I thought there would be more solitude, but I am kind of glad that its not so as I didn't come out here for the people but the people having ended up being a lot more important than I thought they would (1.9).

Snapper: Well, I think it is a lot more than a wilderness trail, and like I said someone might come out here and completely be feeling like they are living in the wild, you know, but I guess also after you have done it for a couple months, you get used to it, so it can be a lot worse, I guess when he started [the trail] like you had to carry either a whole lot more of weight or a lot less stuff and now with the gear changes and everything you can carry stuff to keep yourself somewhat comfortable, more comfortable. And I think he is full of it, if he says it's nothing if it is not a wilderness trail (2.9).

Sidestep: I think he was saying that based on the fact that there was more open space than the population was more, east of here I would think, and the mountains weren't as developed as they are now. Now with all the highways everywhere and people everywhere, it would be impossible to have the same type of trail that he envisioned. He was - I think he is envisioning like a retreat for people, who live an urban life to go into the woods, which it is, I mean you get to do that, you get to get away from regular life, but it's not exactly how he envisioned it, I guess I'm not really sure (21.9).

Snail: But I think if [the AT] was like pure wilderness then it wouldn't have survived as long as it has because you need people to maintain it. You need more people to come out here and experience that and even if you are, you know, a quarter mile away from the Blue Ridge Parkway, like more people know about the AT because they can access it even if it's just for a day hike. And if you had to hike 50 miles to get to the AT, you know, it wouldn't have lasted as long (7.9).

Pumpkin: I think he was wrong. I do think that it is a wilderness trail in my perspective but I don't think that other people would share that perspective (25.9).

Creik: You know, I always feel like I'm experiencing the AT as it is (14.9).

Walkabout: I'm glad that they have set it up like this and they do try and manage it. I'm glad that there is plenty of space still left here in the United States for them to set away big chunks of wilderness like this. And the cars don't bother me at all. It's still nice being out here because where I live up in New Jersey, I'm like a 10 minute drive from New York City. So this is still a big difference in volume of traffic and volume of people for me (12.9).

From earlier excerpts to these most recent ones, a shift can be seen how some participants are conceiving wilderness. Since this portion of the interview was subsequent to the more general questions about an AT thru-hiking experience and wilderness ideals, I recognized many participants reflectively negotiating the tensions that were emerging within their own narratives. The shift in wilderness conception could most generally be considered as relaxing strict definitions or conceptions that adhere to the dominant ideology. For example, on the one hand views expressing the AT as being wilderness at one time in the past represent the dominant ideal based on lack of human influence. On the other hand, this opens up the possibility for the AT to be conceived as temporally changing. This means both that the AT has been successfully cultivated and developed, necessarily because it has not been subject to the narrow ideological notions and that the environment in which the AT is situated also retains the ecological impulse to restore itself to a former state.

5.2.3 Section Summary

In this section I have primarily illustrated the influence of wilderness ideology on AT thru-hikers. First, as general conception of wilderness, thru-hikers described ideals of wilderness that are consistent with the received view of wilderness. These ideals were expressed as both setting characteristics and experiences associated with participants' notions of wilderness thereby illustrating the pervasiveness of wilderness ideology. In addition, when participants were asked to discuss wilderness and the AT, many disparaged the idea of Appalachian wilderness in their current setting and at the same time, implicitly defended alternative notions of wilderness. These attempts at negotiating ideological tensions illustrate not only the influence of wilderness ideology on AT thru-hikers but, perhaps more importantly, the influence of an AT thru-hiking experience on ideological conceptions. This finding provides hope for alternative ideals of wilderness. Insofar as thru-hikers tend to resist the notion of wilderness on the AT thereby disregarding the historical and symbolic aspects of AT wilderness, in contrast to their actual experiences, also suggests the likelihood of a wilderness continuum that is experienced pre-reflectively while ideology infuses reflective musings.

5.3 THE WILDERNESS AND EXPERIENCE CONTINUUM

As discussed in Chapter 4, the AT thru-hiking experience as explicated in this study consisted of four dimensions, each comprised of two converging points formed in a dialectic. Returning to this dialectic allows the inquiry for this chapter to

continue. The dialectical elements in a dimension emerged from variegated views on the thru-hiking experience. Subsequently, throughout the nomothetic process one of the elements emerged primarily according to experiences consistence with ideological notions of wilderness and the other according to alternative experiences. This is not to say that those participants' narratives, expressing received views of wilderness are not compelling; on the contrary, those views necessarily comprised part of each dimension. However, the imperative is to consider the antithesis as egalitarian in the dialectic, which has been colonized and marginalized by the received view but which emerged out of the ecophenomenological explication process. First, research participants described their experiences as comprised of extraordinary perseity as in a grand outdoor experience, bounded sojourning in the trail corridor as escape and disengagement from civilization, sequestering for solitude, and the alterity of a harsh environment. However, participants also described the ordinary perseity embodied in daily, mundane trail life, the unboundedness of the trail milieu that reaches out to trail towns and the urban/rural fringe, intense social bonds in a trail family, and their reliance and compatibility with nature. The former certainly reflects some of the central ideas with the received view of wilderness and the later suggests alternatives.

To reiterate, my fidelity to the existential phenomenological foundations of this study is because of its capacity to 'get to the things themselves' and hence, reveal the many nuanced and variegated experiences in thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail. However, phenomenology is by definition concerned with only a pre-reflective

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Erlebnis (i.e., the primacy of perception) and as such, leaves an inadequate investigation for the objectives of this study. Ecophenomenology's ability to look at the relationality of ecological experiences provides an opportunity to look at the full spectrum of lived experience and explore the colonization of experience by wilderness ideology. Hence, it is my contention that however existential the former experiences are for thru-hikers, it is more evident that the later experiences, equally as existential, become clouded upon increasing reflection. In short, as lived experience becomes increasingly reflective, wilderness ideology infuses it and colonizes it. To be sure, I am not suggesting some deterministic causal relationship between ideology and lived experience but, as ecophenomenology suggests, relationality is the bridge between intentionality and causality. Indeed, many thru-hikers began to negotiate the tensions in their own narratives even within the limited timeframe of our interviews. The received view of wilderness is exactly that – the received view, and as such, is rarely questioned but rather justified upon initial reflection. Negotiating tensions became apparent upon further reflection, or more specifically, critical reflection that was initiated with a dialogue directed at ideological conceptions of the Appalachian Trail.

Again, I want to emphasize that converging points which are consistent with the received view of wilderness are considered equally a part of the operative essence of AT thru-hiking as is their dialectical counterparts insofar that all converging points were emergent in the explication process of pre-reflective experience. However, the

excerpts quoted above regarding wilderness ideals are illustrative of the infusion of wilderness ideology in more reflective modes of lived experience. Similar to Loeffler (2004) asking, "What moments get lost from memory because they don't fit the master narrative of the glorious outdoor experience?" (p. 553), I am asking, what experiences are privileged in initial reflection and memory as a result of wilderness ideology? For example, the ecophenomenological explication process revealed that thru-hikers experience extraordinary and ordinary events, escape in the journey and abidance in dwelling, solitude and socializing, and resistance and reliance in the environment. Accordingly, narratives that are representative of the received view of wilderness, while equally experienced, are privileged upon initial reflection while alternative experiences are marginalized. Consequently, both lived experience and the experience of wilderness need to be considered as continuums capable of accommodating a diverse and complex range of phenomena.

5.4 ECOLITERACY

Although the primary emphasis of this study is expressed in objectives 1 and 2 of Chapter 1, ecological literacy, as discussed in Section 1.7, is an ancillary component of this dissertation that underlies my overall research agenda. As such, in the research interviews if the conversation was naturally inclined to these ideas, I generally regarded it as a natural direction to explore. To the extent that nurturing ecological literacy requires rich sensorial experiences (Golley, 1998), all thru-hikers could be conceived in a process of becoming ecoliterate. Nonetheless, during

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interviews, if I intuitively sensed a meaningful experience that did not conform to ideological ideals, I pursued that thought with the participant. Moreover, just as this study holds to speech grounded in the gestural language of the body and earth, ecoliteracy involves considering the landscape as text (cf. Stables, 1996; Stables & Bishop, 2001) and as such, flows naturally out of ecophenomenology's 'wild logos' with the flesh. Throughout the explication process, it became evident that these instances were usually with thru-hikers who expressed views that converged into Parity under the Wild Imbrication dimension in Chapter 4 or who expressed more obvious tensions in their narratives as described earlier. Consequently, out of the 27 interviews, 20 participants expressed views that emerged out of this conversation which are illustrated below and arranged according to Stables (1998) three types of literacies.

5.4.1 Functional

Functional ecoliteracy suggests the ability to understand the basic principles of ecology and to read the environment in biophysical terms.

Hinesfeet: I am surprised because I thought that I would get much, much more in-tune with nature and it's been two months and I have just now started to learn the meanings of like, any of the plants around me but now that I've adapted to being out here, I think I'll learn a lot more about them (1.10).

Shenanigans: I can identify more plants now and what not. Like people have taught me things along the way, like now I can identify ramps [wild leeks], and at one shelter we had a whole bunch of those and fried them up and, so yeah I'm much more wise about identifying plants and what not. Just picking it up from here and there and that's cool because it makes me feel like I'm becoming familiar with the environment that I'm spending all this time in (20.10).

Old Goat: Well, I made it a goal of mine that while I'm out here I'm going to learn as much about the wildlife and plants and stuff around me as I can. So like, in the back of the thru-hiker's companion, there's that list of animal tracks and bird calls and I'm checking off the ones that I can now identify like, I've seen lots of Opossum and Deer tracks, Red Fox and I'm pretty sure I saw Black Bear tracks. The bird calls are harder but some like the Chickadees and Jays I know and oh yeah, the Owls at night…but I'm also trying to watch how the animals move around each other in certain kinds of patterns and now I try to move quieter myself so that I don't disturb them (4.10).

Greyfox: Back there by uh, Marble Springs, it was really amazing to see all the impact of those Gypsy Moths a few years ago – you can still see all these trees that look almost dead from the moths eating away at the foliage and that really affected me like, that whole stretch there, where [the trail] would have been under shade, your totally exposed to the sun so, there's like this interdependence thing (16.10).

Functional ecoliteracy, representing the most rudimentary level of Stables (1998) model, primarily signifies a literacy regarding the 'facts'. Indeed, while these participants were becoming aware of their environs, the excerpts suggest this awareness is centered on anthropocentric information such as wildlife taxonomies, recognizing edible plants, and observing ecological interdependence only in terms of personal affordance. To the extent that all ecoliteracies are a result of understanding the biophysical world through social, cultural, and ideological conditioning (Stables & Bishop, 2001) functional ecoliteracy represents this understanding as fully-reflected yet unquestioned. In this sense, functional ecoliteracy is consistent with this study's findings on unquestioned wilderness ideals.

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5.4.2 Cultural

Cultural ecoliteracy suggests the ability to understand the cultural significance

of the landscape thereby comprehending the human dimensions of the environment.

Brother Thomas: I think it's a shame that I won't get to experience the huge trees
that are like 20 feet in diameter and what not. It's a shame that they clear cut pretty
much all this and all this falls in everything that are man made and what not. But it's
not as if it's deforested or anything like that. The trees are definitely growing back
and so it's not - it's not like you really see the effect - like unless someone hadn't told
me about the old growth trees and everything, I wouldn't, you know, I wouldn't been
none the wiser because these trees are still very big. And plus there are other things
like the hemlocks are all dying off, I think that's some kind of fungus maybe or some
kind of, you know, environmental impact. There is always, you know, there is always
all sorts of something like that going out and clearing out the old stuff. So it's just a
period in time that I'm hiking now and doesn't happen to be in like I guess, where the
trees were 100 and 200 years old (23.10).

Sidestep: I've learned it's impossible to leave no trace, since you know, you can't.
You can walk down one section of the trail and to the right, there's a section that may
have been there 20 to 30 years ago, you can still see trail, that's the old AT, because
it's a such a rough scar but I think one rough scar is better than a thousand little one's
so the trail, even though it's an impact, it's a good impact that keeps people from
going off into the woods and trampling all over the place (21.10).

Caboose: The animals didn't create this trail, we did, and all the shelters and stuff
that give us a way to hike and stay out here without impacting it too much – I guess
that's it really, like the Appalachians existed before us and the wildlife and then we
created this trail to come out here and enjoy all this, so it's a bit of both natural and
man-made, I mean and woman-made! (13.10).

Participants expressing a cultural level of ecoliteracy recognize human

dimensions that include impacts and modifications which are both historical and

current. Building upon functional ecoliteracy, the cultural level suggests an

increasing ecological awareness of cultural significance such as the evidence of past

timber removable and the importance of the trail's concentrated treadway and narrow

corridor in reducing other impacts. To be sure, the underlying meaning to this

ecoliteracy is in recognizing the significance in human impacts, while not always

positive are necessary in the development, planning and management of the

Appalachian Trail as a recreational corridor. Furthermore, cultural recognition as part

of an ecoliteracy for thru-hikers reinforces the importance of the AT's close

proximity and ease of access in the eastern USA to perhaps, its fundamental success.

5.4.3. Critical

Critical ecoliteracy suggests the ability to explore the significance of the

functional and cultural stories in the landscape and to grasp the importance of

contributing to environmental change through action.

Swiss Miss: I'm one of those packrats, I keep everything, like all my stuff at home is
everywhere but while I'm hiking, everything is so simplified…I thought about when I
get back, I'm just going to get rid of everything, like I kind of just want to start clean,
you know, because half the stuff I have I really don't need, at all (17.10).

Walkabout: …maybe in dealing with the environment could involve getting out and
doing some volunteer work, I could see me doing that. Because there is a section of
the AT that runs through New Jersey and I would like to give back. So that, if this
could cause me to get involved then I know it is a good cause and seen how many
people come out and enjoy it every year (12.10).

Creik: I would definitely like to come back out on shorter trips and bring my friends
and hopefully be able to, you know, learn even more, you know, every time you read
a book you realize, you know, something new about it. So I think that same principle
applies to the trail. Sensory wise I think that's already happening like, I'm so much
more aware of things around me and when I go back I know I'll be overloaded with
all the noise back home and my friends won't understand that until I bring them out
here to experience it (14.10).

These excerpts illuminate some important concepts that resonate with the colonization of experiential recreation in reflective thought. This necessarily occurs at the critical level that builds upon functional and cultural ecoliteracies. Whereas excerpts describing the functional level of ecoliteracy suggested wilderness ideology colonized reflective thought without remainder and at the cultural level to a lesser degree, given the opportunity to critically reflect, I believe many thru-hikers learn much more from the ecology of their thru-hiking experience. Oftentimes the process of becoming ecoliterate is tacit, particularly in reference to ideological notions. However, as discussed earlier, many research participants began to negotiate tensions in their own narratives through the dialog of interviewing. It may be reasonable to suggest that the learning process of ecoliteracy could very well occur through a hiker's dialog with his/her environment as an ecological experience, or in ecophenomenological terms, through one's dehiscence of the flesh. It is in this way that thru-hikers begin to question the view they have received from ideological conceptions of wilderness. Rather than succumbing to ideology, thru-hikers can negotiate the culturally bound meanings of wilderness with their own experiences and constitute their own personal meanings. Moreover, this suggests a process of bringing pre-reflective experience to reflection and subjecting it to a choice. In this way ecoliteracy emerges in thru-hikers' as a contextual and experientially driven process to critically reflect on and negotiate their own experiential tensions. Although ecoliteracy was not actively and explicitly pursued in the overall direction of this

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study, it has emerged as an interesting and evident process through which ideological ideals can be identified, questioned, and negotiated.

5.5 FINAL COMMENTS

In this chapter I have illustrated how research participants expressed wilderness ideals and wilderness experiences in the context of thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail. Moreover, this chapter presented the tensions that were evident in participant narratives concerning the flux of thru-hiking and wilderness ideology. It is evident from these findings that thru-hikers draw on ideological conceptions of wilderness in reflective modes of lived experience. Participants described wilderness as remote, devoid of human influence, containing unique natural features, and capable of eliciting experiential derivatives such as escape, solitude, challenge, and survival. Subsequently, tensions emerged in participant narratives when they were asked to critically reflect on those wilderness ideals within the context of the AT. These tensions emerged initially as a result of an apparent inability to move freely between general and contextual wilderness ideals. To be sure, I am not suggesting, in general, that outdoor recreationists are simply and naïvely receptacles or automatons reacting from a received view of wilderness but this inability to contextually reflect on wilderness reveals the dominance and pervasiveness of wilderness ideology as the "taken-for-granted mix of values, attitudes, beliefs, knowledges, and practices that constitute a sensibility or disposition toward the natural world" (Meisner, 2003, p. 6). Moreover, the ideological conceptions of wilderness and wilderness experiences were

evident in my movement as a researcher between pre-reflective and reflective modes of lived experience. As a result of the explication process in Chapter 4, the emergent range of dialectical experiences provided an investigative backdrop in which to consider the infusion of ideology at reflective modes of experience. However, some participants began to implicitly negotiate the tensions in their narratives and drew upon alternatives and contextual meanings of wilderness that allows wilderness to be conceived and experienced as a continuum. Couched within these findings, I believe, are important implications for research methodology, experiential recreation research and praxis, and the meaning of wilderness itself which are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE PATHWAYS

6.1 OVERVIEW

In Chapters 4 and 5, I present the findings from this study on two levels.
First, Chapter 4 explicated and illustrated the range of thru-hiking experiences that
emerged from the explication process. As a result, the dimensions that emerged in
this part of the study represent the ecophenomenological relationality of an
Appalachian Trail thru-hikers' ecological experience. The dimensions and
corresponding dialectical converging points are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3

Overview of Thru-hiking Experiential Dimensions

Experiential Dimensions	Converging Point A	Converging Point B
Perseity	Extraordinary perseity	Ordinary perseity
Sojourning	Bounded sojourning	Unbounded sojourning
Kinship	Sequestered kinship	Social kinship
Wild Imbrication	Alterity	Parity

Second, Chapter 5 presented the findings of thru-hikers' wilderness ideals and tensions that emerged from the decolonization process. In addition, ecoliteracy was presented as an experientially driven learning process through which thru-hikers could critically reflect on and negotiate the tensions in their experiences. In this sixth and final chapter, I discuss the implications of this study regarding the ecophenomenology of decolonizing experiential recreation in this context. Subsequently, this chapter also includes a brief discussion on this study's limitations and directions for future pathways of research.

6.2 RESEARCH DISCUSSION

I believe this research has contributions in many ways on many levels. The findings in this study indicate that dominant ideological notions of wilderness are pervasive and enduring to the extent of colonizing many experiences of Appalachian Trail thru-hikers as well as their ideals of wilderness. As noted in Chapter 5, participants expressed personal conceptions of wilderness that were consistent with ideological ideals and that these conceptions were not always commensurable with the AT. However, what became evident from the explication process in Chapter 4 is that participants' thru-hiking experience consisted of lived experiences on the AT that included both ideological ideals of wilderness and alternative, personal, and contextual ideals learned while on the trail. Furthermore, when participants reflected further on the prospect of AT wilderness, tensions emerged that were sometimes implicitly negotiated. Given the historically and culturally symbolic nature of the AT

for wilderness, the imperative is to rethink wilderness in terms of a continuum. Although Leopold (1925) was perhaps the first, white, male, North American to publish this idea, it has been largely ignored and hence, I believe this study will contribute to the outdoor recreation literature by reasserting his claim of wilderness as a relative condition. One starting point, as discussed at the beginning of this dissertation, is to reinforce the fact that *de jure* wilderness areas are simply divested from *de facto* wilderness lands that necessarily enclose previous human impacts. Moreover I suggest, as does other researchers (cf. Klyza, 2001) that a wilderness continuum needs to be temporally and spatially constructed.

While the received view of wilderness is well documented (cf. Callicott & Nelson, 1998; Cronon, 1995; Nash, 2001) few scholars have looked at the received view as a dominant ideology that colonizes, or even influences, experience. I believe this to be a result of paradigmatic, theoretical and methodological tendencies that serve to reinforce rather than challenge the status quo. Insofar that wilderness ideology connects many people with nature (or at the very least facilitates outdoor recreation) because of its historically romantic influence, it remains a useful construct in a very general manner. As a result, this study contributes to and expands current understandings (cf. Kendra & Hall, 2000) of dominant and shared ideas of wilderness and wilderness experiences, particularly the pervasive and enduring nature of wilderness ideology upon outdoor recreationists. However, in exploring ideology as an obstacle to individual and contextual meaning, I believe this research project goes

further and suggests that wilderness ideology has become much more; it represents the colonization of individual and contextual wilderness experiences.

Without the critical lens of postcolonial theory, which at first exposes the colonization of nature itself, it becomes difficult to empirically challenge the status quo and explore the diversity of wilderness experiences. Postcolonial theory was used in this study as the heuristic to further the investigation not by simply challenging the received view of wilderness but to expose the colonization of variegate experiences under a dominant ideology. Indeed, without considering the influential flux of historical and cultural frameworks, many meaningful experiences are marginalized, even discarded, because they do not fit within the framework of a dominant wilderness experience. I believe this to be that much more important given the future likelihood of urban and rural centers encroaching closer and closer to protected area boundaries and, as a result of this study, opens the possibility for many more hidden and invisible ideologies to be explored.

As a major proponent of the wilderness critique, Cronon (2003) suggests the term *historical* wilderness as a way to embrace cultural impacts, both negative and positive, along with nature instead of dichotomizing the two. This has already been provided for legislatively in the 1975 Eastern Wilderness Act by recognizing and allowing land that has previous human impacts to be designated *de jure* wilderness. Indeed, of the AT's present 3500 km length, 398 km (11 %) currently traverse 21 *de jure* wilderness areas. Moreover, while not an effort to create more wilderness areas,

major works currently underway like the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's mega-transect project, suggests monitoring programs and even rewilding efforts similar to that which I discussed in Chapter 2. As an Appalachian Ecocorridor, the AT of the future will be a historical wilderness, as it has always been, full of both human and more-than-human impacts that are sustainable and coexisting.

From a phenomenological perspective the complexity of live experienced and hence, the results of this study can best be expressed by allowing the findings as emerged to speak for themselves (van Mannen, 1990). By grounding the empirical study in this conceptual framework, I challenged the status quo of the natural attitude which is often manifested in the outdoor recreation literature and which phenomenological inquiry is capable of and, as a descriptive science, sought to illuminate a full range of thru-hiking experiential phenomena. However, by building on Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology and the philosophical bases of ecophenomenology I have attempted an empirically focused ecophenomenology that may be the first of its kind. In the process, a creative *bricolage* for theoretical and methodological constructs was necessary to ground and conduct this work. This creativity in process is also a creativity in outcome as ultimately, the reader is left with a sense of our flesh, the chiasm where we as human beings-in-the-world are always constantly enfolded and enfolding in seeing and being seen, touching and being touched by the flesh of the world. Indeed, the existential nature of our daily lived experience is rooted in the ecology of our flesh as the primal establishment and

only by the dehiscence of the flesh can we get a sense of ecological lived experience. Recognizing the ecology of experience is recognizing the reversibility, dehiscence, and textures of the flesh. We do this in perpetuum, tacitly and sensorially, exploring our environment but only by attuning ourselves to the richness of variegate experiences with the more-than-human world do become aware. Ecological experiences are thus not romantically conceived and experienced but ecocentrically realized.

From this perspective I believe this study has important implications for future ecophenomenological research that can use and refine the framework I have herein utilized. Specifically, the ecologically-active interviews that were developed in the field and subsequently put into textual format represent the creative and flexible nature of qualitative inquiry. However, I now perceive this kind of interviewing method as particularly necessary to an ecophenemenological study that has fundamentally situated itself to investigate the relationality of lived experience. Positioned as a middle ground between causality and intentionality, relationality requires a methodology that can explore both pre-reflective and reflective modes of experience. Without this kind of approach to examine lived experience, empirical research chooses to be focused on either a pre-reflective phenomenological approach or an explicitly retrospective assessment. Moreover, ecologically-active interviews also engage the embodiment of lived experience which is frequently ignored in many outdoor recreation studies. By bringing the rich sensorial nature of embodied

experience to light, I believe this dissertation can make considerable contributions to the outdoor recreation literature. In addition, this study has articulated experience in such a way that adds to the concept of experience itself. Where previous research has shown experience to be emergent, dynamic, and multiphasic, this research adds the component of vicissitudinous. This means that in addition to outdoor recreation experiences arising casually into powerful and meaningful interactions throughout several phases of an existential situation, the phenomena itself is experienced in a changing and fluctuating manner throughout various modes of lived experience. Recreation researchers should conduct experiential studies that either delimit the mode of experience to be examined or investigate the full range of *Erlebnis*. I believe this study is therefore also indicative of recent calls to conduct "research at smaller scales…that can contribute to a richer vocabulary for describing recreation experiences than our current reliance on such vague terms as 'wilderness experiences'" (McCool & Cole, 2001, p. 96). Indeed, insofar as any wilderness needs to be conceived as a continuum, not to mention Eastern USA wilderness specifically, the experiences explicated in this study are not part of a new wilderness experience but are specifically and uniquely indicative of the AT thru-hiking experience. The concept of a wilderness continuum does not preclude wilderness from existing in idea or place and allows the distinctiveness of contextual experiences to be appreciated in their own right. Likewise, the concept of an experiential continuum that includes

vicissitudes as distinct modes of experience complements experience regarded as emergent, dynamic, and multiphasic.

6.3 MANAGEMENT DISCUSSION

As noted in the final comments of Chapter 4, Appalachian Trail Conservancy personnel and their respective National Park Service counterparts, while most are likely well aware of the social aspects of thru-hiking, might be surprised to see how ubiquitous and meaningful they are in the thru-hiking experience as compared to the list of mandated experiences. As discussed in Chapter 1, the ATC is formally concerned with experiences such as:

- opportunities for observation, contemplation, enjoyment, and exploration of the natural world;

- a sense of remoteness and detachment from civilization;

- opportunities to experience solitude; freedom; personal accomplishment; self-reliance; and self-discovery;

- a sense of being on the height of the land;

- opportunities to experience the cultural, historical, and pastoral elements of the surrounding countryside;

- a feeling of being part of the natural environment; and

- opportunities for travel on foot, including opportunities for long-distance hiking (ATC, 1997).

These types of experiences were certainly evident in participant narratives however, they really only represent a partial understanding of the actual thru-hiking experience. Managing the AT simply for social reasons may sound somewhat trite but what

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would the implications be if there was more of a concerted effort or focus on the entire trail community as a social-ecological system? On one hand, the social fabric of the AT has and will continue to flourish without the promotion of any agency and on the other hand, the ATC already actively pursues the involvement of a significant portion of the trail community as volunteers in trail maintenance. This later aspect is directly related to the management structure of the ATC.

Termed the Cooperative Management System, the ATC cooperatively works with 30 local trail clubs who employ the help of hundreds of volunteers annually. Some of these volunteers are former thru-hikers and it is reasonable to consider that knowledge gained from thru-hiking implicitly makes its way into active service. Nonetheless, as a unit of the National Park Service, the human-use management framework is mandated from a legislative requirement (i.e., 1978 National Parks and Recreation Act, Public Law 95-625) to address user capacity in planning and management for parks (Sacklin, Legg, Creachbaum, Hawkes, & Helfrich, 2000). In particular, the NPS has developed the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) framework to address visitor management and user capacity issues within the National Park System. VERP has an intellectual lineage consisting of, most notably, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, each of which are grounded in carrying capacity theory (cf. Manning, 2001; NPS, 1997, 2001; Payne and Nilsen, 2002). These approaches to human-use management typically employ indirect management techniques to reduce potential negative impacts on the environment and others'

experiences. Accordingly, there is virtually no management goal to gain knowledge of what the thru-hiker has experienced as a result of his/her thru-hike and how that knowledge can be incorporated into management. In short, the current approach to AT management ironically but essentially posits the participant in opposition to the effort to minimize negative environmental impacts instead of embracing and attempting to understand the variegated experiences that can inform management.

The findings of ecoliteracy as described in Chapter 5 carry implications for managers who might well be served to understand the extent to which thru-hiker ecoliteracy can affect and improve the sustainability of the trail corridor. In particular, ecologically literate thru-hikers may develop an ecological ethic not romantically inclined but experientially realized that could produce useful experiential knowledge of the environment in which they are extensively immersed. However, the ATC may want to embrace a more adaptive management framework, that is, treating policies more as experiments, and explore the AT as the socio-ecological system that it is. Folke, Colding, and Berkes (2003) suggest to build adaptive capacity requires: learning to live with change and uncertainty, nurturing diversity for reorganization and renewal, combining different types of knowledge for learning, and creating opportunity for self-organization. Initially it may be easy to discount the ecoliteracy of thru-hikers as simple folk knowledge but this form of knowledge, grounded as an experiential form of learning similar to the phenomenological underpinnings of this study, has received increased scientific

currency in recent years (cf. Brody, 2005; Moller, Berkes, Lyver, & Kislalioglu, 2004). Folk knowledge, or traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) as it is more often referred, is also now being considered as adaptive management in wilderness settings (cf. Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2000; Watson, Alessa, & Glaspell, 2003; Whiteman, 2004). Likewise, the role and value of experience in environmental management has also gained considerable currency (Fazey & McQuie, 2005). To the extent that TEK is "the knowledge and insights acquired through extensive observation of an area or a species" (Huntington, 2000, p. 1270, I suggest the process of ecoliteracy for thru-hikers could very well result in a kind of experiential ecological knowledge that may be explicitly utilized in an adaptive management framework. This thru-hiking knowledge is the derivative of an extended, immersed, and embedded experience in the socio-ecological environment of the Appalachian Trail.

The findings in this study lend support to the argument for a differential approach to outdoor recreation and wilderness management. By focusing on the ecophenomenology of thru-hikers' experience, I was able to capture rich descriptions of experiences as well as an understanding into the nature of experiential learning on the AT for use in management decisions. Indeed, phenomenological research, in general, is becoming more accessible and more attractive in management related research (Ehrich, 2005). Hence, these findings may help AT managers understand the complex and interrelated nature of historical wilderness experiences in thru-hiking

and help expand and preserve the range of opportunities available. Furthermore, the close alignment of idyllic wilderness experiences with several AT experiences, in the context of a wilderness continuum may allow some managers to communicate the historical wilderness of the Appalachian Trail that was so close to Benton MacKaye's heart.

6.4 STUDY LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this study are primarily related to the scope of research. The Appalachian Trail represents a unique cultural yet contested symbol of wilderness and as such was purposefully chosen as a site suitable for exploring the ideas of wilderness ideology and outdoor experience. However, as suggested by Freed (2004), in addition to wilderness, the AT also symbolizes the frontier, other similar trails and long trails in general. Subsequently, while the concepts of decolonization are not specific to this study, the research herein focused only on wilderness ideology. It is conceivable there are many other ideologies at work that add to the complexity of a thru-hiker's experience that was not explored in this dissertation. Therefore, some of the specific findings in this study may or may not be found in other experiential recreation contexts.

Furthermore, the findings in this study are limited to the dimensions of a thru-hiking experience from the perspective of the thru-hikers that were sampled. Insofar as the trail community comprises more than just thru-hikers, such as people providing trail magic, etc, and thereby adding to the thru-hiking experience, it could be argued

that these people could have been interviewed to understand the thru-hiking

experience from their perspective. Therefore, other thru-hiking experiences may exist

that were not represented in this study. Considering the uniqueness and changeability

of recreation experiences there is no certainty that a similar study with another group

of thru-hikers or during another hiking season would produce similar results.

The final limitation of this study is also an opportunity as its

phenomenological base has implicitly intended to raise more questions than it

answered. This is the inherent nature and value of a phenomenologically based

inquiry. As a result, there is no overall summation or hypothesis or proposition. Due

to this dissertation's roots in philosophical and existential thought, van Manen (1990)

suggests those unfamiliar with phenomenology will unsuccessfully seek a conclusive

result, as the overarching finding of the research project. To be sure, phenomenology

should provide the reader with a better *understanding* of the phenomena in question

however; it does not seek *explanation* (Creswell, 1998; Relph, 1970). The value in

this understanding is that it offers a meaningful structure of lived experience which is

the primordial state of knowledge and that this can lead to the search for explanation

in other forms of research (Dukes, 1984). As such, this limitation evolves into the

opening for future pathways.

6.5 FUTURE PATHWAYS

Throughout the duration of this project, several avenues for future research

emerged with respect to the AT. In reference to the limitations just mentioned future

research should explore other ideologies at work that colonize experiences, including experiences of other members of the trail community such as volunteers and managers. There appears to be a great deal of currency in postcolonial theory as well as ecophenomenology for investigating these kinds of phenomena. Nevertheless, following this line of inquiry might serve to develop a grounded theory regarding the continuum of *Erlebnis* and specific modes of lived experience that are infused by ideology.

Other future research might look to extend the ideas of learning that are suggested in this study such as an experiential account of TEK. Research seeking ecoliteracy in this sense might understand exactly what and how thru-hikers learn about their environment as a result of an extended and immersed experience of long distance hiking. In moving towards this aim, researchers could build on what Davidson-Hunt and Berkes (2003) call "learning as you journey" which is predicated on general experiential learning and the adaptation of traditional ecological knowledge frameworks.

Building upon the management implications that are outlined in this chapter, future study might also develop the groundwork for a human-use management framework that has the adaptive capacity to give voice to those whom it intends to serve, accommodates discursive and dialectical experiences, and seeks to learn from experiential ecological knowledge. Scientific inquiry with this objective could

potentially move beyond the privileged position of carrying capacity to a more

intimate and embedded approach to maintaining complex socio-ecological systems.

Lastly, from a personal perspective, I would like to see research on the

Appalachian Trail that considers the production of culture from an ethnographic

orientation as well as autoethnographic perspectives. Creative research strategies can

illuminate the rich and diverse experiences that continue to draw millions of visitors

to the AT annually.

6.6 FINAL THOUGHTS

This study represents my first attempt at phenomenological research and in

many ways is exploratory. To add the complexity of an ecological phenomenology

was, at times, a daunting task, not to mention intertwining postcolonial theory, albeit

this was a heuristic treatment of the later. However, I believe justice has been done to

the theoretical nature of this study and hence, offers a unique mingling of orientations

to produce a refreshing look at outdoor recreation experiences. In fact, there were

several times I was not sure exactly what direction the study would take – but that

idea in itself was reassuring. To let not only the study findings be fully emergent but

the overall structure and process of research, I believe, gave this study a creative

dimension that I could have never simply constructed from the outset. In this way,

there were times when this study appeared to take on a life of its own and I, as

researcher, was only along for the ride. In this part of the research journey there was

a level of freedom and faith that I have never experienced in science before. Hence,

each chapter written represents that journey and as such, I proudly present this dissertation as the culmination of both a careful and critical examination of the literature and phenomenon under investigation as well as an innovative inquiry that might expand the horizons of future ecological and experiential research.

APPENDIX A
VERBAL INTRODUCTION SCRIPT

Hello, my name is Clark Zealand. While I am a thru-hiker, I'm also a Ph.D. student in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada [show potential participant UW ID] and I'm starting a new research project to study the many experiences of thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail. Since you're a fellow thru-hiker, I thought I'd ask you!

If you are willing to participate, which is entirely voluntary, I would like to chat with you about your experiences on the trail. This should take only about 15 to 30 minutes, and to make the most efficient use of your time, I request that you permit me to tape-record our conversation so that I can concentrate completely on our discussion without having to pause to write down your comments. So you can read more about the project, here is an information sheet that provides more details [hand potential participant information sheet].

In terms of the questions I have, we would chat exclusively about your perspectives about thru-hiking: What experiences have you had while hiking the trail? After our discussion, if you wish, I can mail you a copy of the transcript of our conversation so you can clarify, change, or omit any comments. In other words, I want to make every effort to represent your views accurately.

This research study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Waterloo's Office of Research Ethics. The results of the study are intended for an academic audience, so they might be published in academic journals and presented at academic conferences. I assure you I'm not a writer or journalist who is out to present the Appalachian Trail community in a negative light; rather, I'm simply a researcher who is interested in studying how and why people come to hike the Appalachian Trail and the experience (s) they gain.

Given the information I just shared with you, can I ask you a few questions about your experience (s)?

Thank you for helping me out.

STUDY INFORMATION AND IMPLIED CONSENT

A Study of Appalachian Trail Thru-hiker Experiences

I am conducting a study about thru-hiking experiences on the Appalachian Trail. The study is intended to help me gain a greater understanding of what and how people experience in their natural and social environments while long distance hiking. Because you are a thru-hiker yourself, your opinions are important to my study. Thus, I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about this topic.

Participation in the study is *entirely voluntary*. Should you agree to participate, it would involve approximately a 15 to 30-minute interview here on the trail, during which we can chat about your experiences. There are no anticipated risks associated with this project. Nevertheless, although the questions are quite general (for example, "Can you tell me a story about a meaningful experience?"), you may decline answering them at any time during the course of the interview. You are also welcome to withdraw your participation at any time before or during the interview, with no questions asked.

To make the most efficient use of your time, I request that you permit me to tape-record our conversation so that I can concentrate completely on our discussion without having to pause to record your comments myself. The tape recording will be kept confidential, and once transcribed, will be stored for two years in a locked filing cabinet in my office, after which the tapes will be destroyed. If you are interested, a transcript of the conversation can be provided to you, and you are welcome to change, omit, clarify, and add any comments to it. Direct quotations resulting from your interview may be reported in subsequent research reports or publication of the study, but at no time will your identity be revealed. These anonymous quotes will only be used in academic reports and journal articles. Your identity, and any reference to you, will remain completely anonymous. Interview transcripts, like taped recordings, will be stored for two years in a locked filing cabinet in my office.

This project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Paul Eagles of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo and has been reviewed by, and received clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Eagles at 1-519-888-4567, ext. 2716. If you have any questions or

concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Susan Sykes in the Office of Research Ethics at 1-519-888-4567, ext. 6005. More importantly, if you are interested in contacting me directly about this study, please call me at either 1-705-324-4405 or email at <ctwzeala@ahsmail.uwaterloo.ca>. Thank you for your assistance with this project!

Sincerely,

Clark Zealand

Clark T.W. Zealand, M.A.
Ph.D. Candidate, University of Waterloo

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Opening

Let's start with a story. Can you tell me a story about a meaningful experience you've already had during your thru-hike? What makes this experience so memorable for you? Remember, there are no wrong answers. Whatever your view may be, it is greatly appreciated.

Theme 1: General Experience

1. Can you outline for me what activities and/or experiences comprise an average day of hiking for you, from sun-up to sun-down?

2. How does your overall thru-hiking experience change throughout the day?

3. How do you define what might be called 'the AT experience'?

4. What experiences are unique to the thru-hiker community?

Theme 2: Nuances of the Experience

5. In your opinion, what are some typical and not-so-typical experiences a thru-hiker would encounter on the AT?

6. As your body has adapted to the physical demands of long distance hiking, how has this affected your experience?

7. Can you describe how your senses influence an experience?

8. Does your hiking gear in any way influence your experience? How?

Theme 3: Ideology & Experience

9. What is wilderness to you?

10. Is there any form of wilderness on the AT?

11. Benton MacKaye once said, "The Appalachian Trail is a wilderness trail or it is nothing". What do you think?

APPENDIX D
FEEDBACK LETTER

University of Waterloo
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
200 University Ave. W.
Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G1
(519) 888-4567, ext. 3894
e-mail: <ctwzeala@ahsmail.uwaterloo.ca>

Dear [name of research participant]:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for participating in the study about thru-hikers' Appalachian Trail experiences. I truly appreciate your support for the study and your willingness to commit the time to share your views with me.

All told, I entered this research project with one goal in mind: to gain a greater understanding of what and how people experience in their natural and social environments while long distance hiking. Undoubtedly, your insights contributed toward my achievement of this goal. They have already made an invaluable contribution to the final analysis of the research project.

To give you an idea of what I have discovered so far …

[Insert brief description of initial findings]

I invite you to send me your comments and I shall take them into consideration as I revise these initial findings. And of course, you may, as always, contact Dr. Susan Sykes of our Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567, ext. 6005, if my description and interpretations raises any concerns for you.

If you wish to receive further details about the outcomes of the study, please contact me at the e-mail address or phone number listed above. I would be delighted to share with you a summary of the completed project. Given the current status of the project, I suspect the final report will be available by [insert date].

Again, thank you for participation.

Sincerely,
Clark T. W. Zealand, M.A.
Ph.D. Candidate, University of Waterloo

Macros for Finding and Tagging Blocks of Text in Microsoft Word

```
Sub Tag_Themes()
'
' Tag_Themes Macro
' Macro created 8/15/2006 by Clark Zealand
'
Dim Tag$
Tag$ = InputBox("What theme do you want to use?", "Mark Themes", "")
Tag$ = CleanString(Tag$) 'cleans nonprinting chars
Tag$ = LTrim$(RTrim$(Tag$)) 'removes spaces at beginning and end
If Tag$ = "" Then 'checks for cancel or blank text box
GoTo Finish
End If
Selection.Cut 'cuts selection for text, stores to memory
Selection.TypeText Text:=" [[" 'adds begin mnemonic symbols
WordBasic.Insert Tag$ 'adds theme
Selection.TypeText Text:="]]" 'adds begin mnemonic symbols
Selection.Paste 'pastes selection
Selection.TypeText Text:=" [[>" 'adds begin mnemonic symbols
WordBasic.Insert Tag$ 'adds theme
Selection.TypeText Text:="]] " 'adds end mnemonic symbols
Finish::
End Sub
Sub Find_Themes()
'
' Find_Themes Macro
' Macro created 8/15/2006 by Clark Zealand
'
Dim Tag$
Dim BeginTag$
Dim EndTag$
Dim Workdoc$
Dim Hitsdoc$
Dim Currentdir$
Dim Count_
Hitsdoc$ = "Hits.doc"
Workdoc$ = WordBasic.[FileName$]() 'identifies current working document
Currentdir$ = WordBasic.[FileNameInfo$](WordBasic.[FileName$](), 5)
```

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```
Hitsdoc$ = "Hits.doc" 'identifies location of hits document
Hitsdoc$ = Currentdir$ + Hitsdoc$ '
Tag$ = InputBox("What theme do you want to search for?", "Search Themes", "")
Tag$ = CleanString(Tag$) 'cleans nonprinting chars
Tag$ = LTrim$(RTrim$(Tag$)) 'removes spaces at beginning and end
BeginTag$ = "[[" + Tag$ + "]]" 'creates beginning marker
EndTag$ = "[[" + Tag$ + "]]" 'Creates end marker
If Tag$ = "" Then 'checks for cancel or blank text box
GoTo Finish '
End If '
WordBasic.FileOpen Name:=Hitsdoc$, Revert:=0 'Result Header
Selection.TypeParagraph '
Selection.TypeParagraph '
WordBasic.Insert "Searching For Theme:" + Tag$ '
Selection.TypeParagraph '
Selection.TypeParagraph '
WordBasic.FileOpen Name:=Workdoc$, Revert:=0 '
For Count_ = 1 To 1000 'Beginning of loop (max set for 1,000 hits)
Selection.EscapeKey
Selection.Find.ClearFormatting 'Search for beginning marker
With Selection.Find '
.Text = BeginTag$ '
.Replacement.Text = "" '
.Forward = True '
.Wrap = False '
.Format = False '
.MatchCase = False '
.MatchWholeWord = False '
.MatchWildcards = False '
.MatchSoundsLike = False '
.MatchAllWordForms = False '
End With '
Selection.Find.Execute '
If WordBasic.EditFindFound() = 0 Then 'Stop if not found
WordBasic.FileOpen Name:=Hitsdoc$, Revert:=0 '
If Count_ = 1 Then 'Hit summary
WordBasic.Insert "End of Search: No Hits Found" '
Else '
WordBasic.Insert "End of Search:" + Str(Count_ - 1) + "Hits Found"
Selection.TypeParagraph '
Selection.TypeParagraph '
```

```
WordBasic.FileOpen Name:=Workdoc$, Revert:=0 '
End If '
GoTo Finish
Else
Selection.MoveRight Unit:=wdCharacter, Count:=1
Selection.TypeText Text:="**//**" 'Inserts temp front marker
Selection.Find.ClearFormatting 'Finds End Marker
With Selection.Find '
.Text = EndTag$ '
.Replacement.Text = "" '
.Forward = True '
.Wrap = False '
.Format = False '
.MatchCase = False '
.MatchWholeWord = False '
.MatchWildcards = False '
.MatchSoundsLike = False '
.MatchAllWordForms = False '
End With
Selection.Find.Execute
Selection.MoveLeft Unit:=wdCharacter, Count:=1
Selection.Extend 'Starts at end of text chunk
Selection.Find.ClearFormatting '
With Selection.Find '
.Text = "**//**"" "
.Replacement.Text = "" '
.Forward = False '
.Wrap = False '
.Format = False '
.MatchCase = False '
.MatchWholeWord = False '
.MatchWildcards = False '
.MatchSoundsLike = False '
.MatchAllWordForms = False '
End With '
Selection.Find.Execute 'Finds beginning of text chunk
Selection.MoveRight Unit:=wdWord, Count:=1, Extend:=wdExtend
Selection.Copy 'Copies selection to memory
Selection.MoveLeft Unit:=wdCharacter, Count:=2
Selection.TypeBackspace 'Erases temp front marker
Selection.TypeBackspace '
```

```
Selection.TypeBackspace '
Selection.TypeBackspace '
Selection.TypeBackspace '
Selection.TypeBackspace '
Selection.Find.ClearFormatting
With Selection.Find 'Moves cursor to end of hit
.Text = EndTag$
.Replacement.Text = "" '
.Forward = True '
.Wrap = False '
.Format = False '
.MatchCase = False '
.MatchWholeWord = False '
.MatchWildcards = False '
.MatchSoundsLike = False '
.MatchAllWordForms = False '
End With '
Selection.Find.Execute '
Selection.MoveRight Unit:=wdCharacter, Count:=1 'Sets up for next search
WordBasic.FileOpen Name:=Hitsdoc$, Revert:=0 'Switches to Hits document
WordBasic.Insert Str(Count_) + ". " 'Counts number of hits
Selection.Paste 'Pastes hit
Selection.TypeParagraph 'Blank line
Selection.TypeParagraph 'Blank line
WordBasic.FileOpen Name:=Workdoc$, Revert:=0 'Returns to original document
Selection.EscapeKey
End If
Next
Finish::
End Sub
```

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