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## “We Need to Talk...” Evolving Conversations about Wildlife Ethics in Hunting Media

**Introduction.** In the context of hunting, most of hunter behavior is guided by informal norms for right and wrong conduct. Indeed, some hunters maintain that formal regulation is “secondary” to one’s ethical code (von Essen, “In the Gap” 166). The ethical code here describes *morally justifiable means of killing, stalking, managing and talking about game*. It is based in large part on culturally shared values, enabling diverse hunters to coordinate their practices within the currently agreed boundaries between right and wrong (Luke). However, there has been limited effort or will on the part of hunters to articulate what these ethics *are*. Or, indeed, why following ethics rather than legal rules is preferred. This may be due to the fact that exposing what are seen as highly personal values means not only opening up the hunting collective to scrutiny over these principles from their peers and from the general public. It also means reflexivity is required on the part of hunters to search themselves to articulate the constitutive features of this ethic in the first place. In this paper, contemporary western hunters’ reflexivity over their ethics is examined over recent decades in Sweden: how are ethics and ideas of right and wrong discussed and how do Swedish hunters view ethics discussions generally — desirable, necessary or uncomfortable?

Previous research firmly argues against such reflexivity. Hunting scholars almost invariably maintain that the exposure of ethics to a critical discussion is neither possible nor desirable, given that hunters’ ethics are a *personal* and *contextual* matter best left to the individual in that particular situation (see for example Hanna; Leopold; Marvin; Posewitz). For Gibson, for example, hunting “cannot be understood on the basis of a priori ethical principles” (470). For Cohen, similarly, hunters’ ethics have no ostensive coherence or design that can stand in a discussion about its constitutive features. Even Aldo Leopold maintains that “the ethics of sportsmanship is not a fixed code, but must be formulated and practiced by *the individual*” (232; emphasis mine). As a corollary to this, hunters’ ethics have remained underresearched. While ethnographers readily seek to uncover indigenous hunters’ ethics, taboos and wildlife values (Sodikoff), the ethics of contemporary secular hunting communities are relegated to the mystical domain of moral relativism and subjectivism (von Essen, “The impact of modernization”). This is paradoxical when seen against these hunters’ explicit championing of their high ethical standards before the public (Kaltenborn et al.; Lindqvist et al.), often to deter detail

regulation, as if to say “we have our own system that works” in the countryside. This attitude is enshrined in the principle of “freedom with responsibility,” by which care and accountability toward wildlife is argued to emanate from within hunters’ own ranks rather than from externally imposed regulation (Löfmarck et al.).

But freedom with responsibility does not mean freedom from having a searching discussion about their ethics before the public. In the privacy of their own homes, hunters can conduct themselves however they want, but their interactions with wildlife must be subject to dialogue inasmuch as wildlife is a public good in modernity (Nurse). Further, hunters are dependent on the non-hunting public’s support for their continued practices with this good. Indeed, hunters today must try to formulate an ethic that is “logically consistent and intuitively appealing to this moderate majority” (Peterson 310), which may require putting their ethics up for discussion.

Nevertheless, it is a methodological challenge to de-mystify and de-relativize hunters’ wildlife ethics to reveal logical consistencies. Surveys, in-depth interviews, and participant observation are tools that can uncover hunters’ ethics talk, by asking hunters about or observing hunters regarding their views on shooting practices, their conceptions of right and wrong, and ethical dilemmas in the field. The principal methodological challenge here is that contemporary hunters are sometimes reluctant respondents in terms of opening up to self-scrutiny and to researchers. This has been remedied, in part, through sustained ethnographic work building trust (Bogliogli; Gibson) or indirect interview techniques that encourage hunters to problematize the behavior of distant others or hypothetical situations rather than to incriminate themselves directly (Child & Darimont; Nuno & St. John; Pohja-Mykrä & Kurki). In the context of ethics in particular, hunters are more likely to raise ethical issues from a critical point of view, in part, to emphasize their own ethical credentials (Kuentzel).

A more instructive approach to finding out to what extent, and how, hunters conduct ethics discussions in their communities is to look at “natural data” in the form of the occurrence and shape of such discussions in hunters’ own media, both online and print. Here, the sorts of ethics topics that are covered, the tone with which they are reported (e.g. critical) and the responses they generate by hunters can tell us something about the ethics talk as it currently featured in hunting magazines, on hunting websites, and on social media like community and hobby forums. The greatest benefit to a media analysis for this purpose is that texts can be examined both for the constitutive features of the ethic, and for meta-communicative discussions. The latter refers to hunters’

writing about how the hunting collective generally talks about ethics, and so represents reflexivity.

The aim of the following study is to canvas hunting media in Sweden to capture hunters' evolving ethics talk. A large volume of hunting media is surveyed across six decades to track the changing nature of ethics and hunters' awareness and presentation of ethics as an issue within their community. Findings are clustered in two broad themes that were constituted inductively from the media survey: (1) an increased need to problematize their ethics; and (2) nationalistic pride over "Swedish" hunting ethics. Sub-themes are presented under each cluster. A central and instructive term that was found inductively from the research is "hunterlike behavior" ("jägarmässighet" in Swedish). The discussion synthesizes the trends and elaborates on their drivers and future directions, by considering the historical contexts and modalities in which hunting ethics are shaped (List), including Sweden's ascension into the EU in 1994 and the relative status of hunting in society across decades.

The study responds to a call from hunters to increasingly attend to ethics in hunting, albeit a call that is not unequivocally sounded from all hunting actors. Yet it is also grounded in calls for outlining hunting ethics from multiple actors in society, including the broader public, ENGOs, and wildlife managers and researchers who equally desire clarity on hunters' ethics if they are to be continued to be trusted with managing the public good of wildlife. This much was identified in the Nordic Hunting in Society Research Symposium (Hansen et al.) and reiterated by the Illegal Hunting Practitioners Symposium (von Essen et al.). Ethics can be distilled, I argue, not by asking hunters to self-report their ethics talk or about their ethical principles *directly* (as they will routinely say generic things like "all animals are equal" and "treat the game with respect"), but by examining how they cover the topic of ethics in their own enclaves. With this, the study is an outsider's foray into a discussion community characterized by reticence regarding allowing outsiders in. In the discussion, I problematize the permeability and the totality of this community. I argue that even if many contemporary western hunting communities today increasingly erect a "defensive shield" to the outside (Ojalampi & Blomley), they are also deeply affected by societal changes in values. This means that, first, there is a dialectic process of evolving public sentiment in relation to animals suffusing into hunting at all times, and second, that hunters are also *part of the moderate majority* that actively constitutes animal ethics also in the public sphere.

**Method.** This study resulted from a 3-year research project on illegal hunting among Swedish hunters. This interview-based project sought to apprehend hunters' relationship with and trust in formal rules and their institutions. Interestingly, these interviews turned up a dense system also of informal rules that was outside the scope of this project to cover as a theme unto itself. These rules were contested, but they were also eager points of discussion for respondents. Thematically clustering these "hunting ethics" issues resulted in a clear call for new research that I now embark on: a study that would delve deeper into ethics. Rather than rely wholly on the results from the previous project, this study set out to re-canvass the hunting community for ethical issues using a complementary method of data collection to interviews: a text analysis of social, digital and print media.

To begin with, expert unstructured interviews were conducted via telephone with six editors of Swedish hunting magazines and four journalists. The researcher interviewed the editors of *Svensk Jakt*, *Jaktjournalen*, *Allt om Jakt och Vapen*, *Jaktmarker & Fiskevatten*, *Big Game*, and *Jaktojägare* as the journals in the hunting field. The journals have slightly different profiles on the market, with *Svensk Jakt* being the oldest classical magazine and in many ways the least likely to "offend," being mainstream and erring on the side of caution for ethics. *Big Game* is a new and more internationally oriented addition to the field, focusing on grand visuals and cosmopolitan hunters. *Jaktojägare* is the second most popular hunting magazine and is partly known for including the perspective of everyday working-class hunters. The remaining magazines are smaller and more specialized, with *Allt om Jakt och Vapen* targeting gearheads and *Jaktmarker & Fiskevatten* writing also for anglers. The hunting journalists selected for interviews were either personally recommended by the editors and/or notable (in the sense of being mentioned in or having authored articles in the magazines). Interviews with each respondent lasted an average of 45 minutes on phone. They are anonymous, as the study sought not to provide portraits of individuals but looked for "themes across the body of participants as a whole" (Pickering & Kara). For transparency's sake, however, respondents are tracked as R1 (Respondent 1), R2, R3, etc.

A preliminary list of ethics issues was produced from interviews. This was later revised upon undertaking preliminary reading of hunting media. In the final stage, a series of relevant search terms could be generated to narrow the search in media. These included words like *etik\**, *jägarmässig\**, *sportslig\**, *fel*, *moral\**, *kontroversiell\**, and *känslig\**, with asterisks to capture variability in word use. From these search terms +150 entries were identified for analysis online. In printed magazines, texts were surveyed for ethical issues focusing on, but not limited to, these words. *Svensk Jakt*, the oldest and largest

hunting magazine, was subject to the most complete search featuring volumes from 1959 to today. *Jaktjournalen* and *Jaktmarker & Fiskevatten* were also consulted back to the 1970s. Occasional volumes were missing, but material across every year was available. The complete volumes of a year were surveyed at three-year intervals (all volumes of 1975, 1978, 1981, etc). This was preferred over an approach that would read fewer volumes over more years, with the reasoning that an entire year's worth of magazines would be more representative. That is, it would be likelier to capture some ethics discussions than would randomly selecting only January, July and December volumes.

The findings were coded manually into principal themes. A boundary was set to exclude themes on ethics that did not pertain to wildlife or environment *directly*, but which may have dealt with social codes of conduct in hunting teams or weapon preferences and practices (as turned up in the search terms). The study distilled themes down into two clusters in this paper. In the end, these were chosen because they operated both on the meta-level — i.e. hunters' talk about ethics, even talk about how they do not talk about ethics — and the practical level, i.e. hunting and shooting practices that were identified as ethically problematic in some way, including the character of wild boar and bear hunts in recent years. In this way they capture, on the one hand, increased reflexivity of hunters in problematizing their ethics, and, on the other hand, the specific junctures at which ethics arguably need to be further discussed.

The choice of surveying also online social media was a considered one with ethical ramifications. A large hunters social forum, robsoft (the leading such forum for hunters) even has a forum board for "hunting ethics" in which various discussion threads are posted by users, and so was an intuitive search ground for tapping into current discussions on ethics by hunters. The forum was recommended by several hunters both in the previous research project and in the course of the expert informal interviews. Holtz et al. write that experts and insiders may be of help "in judging the typicality of forums or in characterizing the community running and using the forum" (7) and robsoft was identified as typical of hunters by interview respondents.

Accessing forum posts may be problematic inasmuch as, first, forums often require membership log-ins to read and post, and, second, using exact quotations can make original posts easy to find and compromise anonymity. In the case of robsoft, the forum is openly accessible to all and every thread is public. However, membership was required in order to utilize the search function on posts. Because original postings are in Swedish and were translated into English, making direct search hits unlikely, moreover,

the anonymity of posters has been preserved. No users are mentioned by name, but posts are identified by date. Methods literature is beginning to explore the benefits of researching social media to tap into attitudes and discussions, citing the relatively large amounts of “natural data” and the “moderated virtual focus group” setting of social forums as advantages to the researcher (Holtz et al., Moloney et al.). Responding to critiques that an online disinhibition effect following the relative anonymity of forum posting may distort data, such research is also showing that forums are an enclave that permits candid reflections that are mostly truthful in nature (Glaser et al., Im & Chee). Since this observation is fifteen years old, it might be pertinent to believe the naturalization of internet forums as a mode of communication in recent years has further normalized the discourses that feature here.

In the hunting forum context, hunters have been asked about the representativeness and truth of postings online by recent researchers exploring the discourse on illegal hunting. While non-users of the forum speculated as to the occasionally sensationalist, narcissistic, or macho exaggerations of hunting stories, or a readiness to break the law that might feature in this context, users of the forum overwhelmingly suggested robsoft contained a true statements and that it formed its own peer community with rules (von Essen, “In the Gap”). This coheres with recent research noting that such forums form an “environment for peer-to-peer communication in which tensions and stigmas may be removed and opinions can be expressed with fewer inhibitions” (Im & Chee 524). While cautioning against entirely replacing traditional forms of qualitative data collection with social media, the latest research on hunters’ interactions online suggests that studying such forums is increasingly important to capture the full scope of hunters’ present communication with one another (Ebeling-Schuld & Darimont; Eid & Handal; von Essen). They are also important sites to cover inasmuch as they feature less official information and everyday talk (Mörner & Olausson). This has two important implications. First, the forum avoids hunter homogeneity by opening up to a potentially geographically, socially, and economically broad gathering of hunters not bound to a locality. Second, the forum can question authority and official news sources. Indeed, the hunting magazines of the Swedish Hunting Association or the National Hunters Association may be said to constitute an official discourse of hunters as a collective (to some degree), while blog entries on the former site and readers’ comments under articles on the latter site, but also threads on forums on these articles, run a parallel discourse. This parallel discourse sometimes reproduces the official one, but it also questions it. This was found, for example, in the works of Engbladh (2016) and von Essen (“Whose discourse is it anyway?”), showing how different corners of the website of hunting associations communicate about wolves in Sweden differently.

In the Nordic countries, hunters are arguably more internet-experienced than in many other parts of the world as state agencies rely on their inventory reporting of game populations through digital databases that update in real-time (Helle et al.). All of this combined points to the relevance and value of consulting online social media when accessing modern hunters. To summarize, data is taken from four sources:

Physical print magazines (approximately 30 volumes selected from every decade, a whole year surveyed, with a three-year interval, 1960s-2010s, constituting a total of 180 magazines);

Online articles from these magazines' websites (using search function);

Forum posts (using search function);

Ten expert interviews (unstructured phone interviews), six of which with hunting magazine editors and four with hunting journalists.

Together, these comprise a comprehensive discursive community, minus private conversations between hunters in the field, in the car, at their local shop, and so on. Due to the impracticability of quantifying findings, a qualitative content analysis is performed that records how ethics is talked about rather than an attempt to estimate frequency across a diverse and evolving material (earlier decades lack certain volumes, entire magazines, and of course online presence in a way that precludes systematic comparison using statistics). Each theme begins with documenting the current situation and recent publications, and works back in history.

## FINDINGS

### 1. We need to talk... about ethics.

*1.1 Interrogating the meaning of jägarmässighet ("hunterlike behavior").* In interviews with hunting-magazine editors, respondents suggest that hunters sometimes crave both greater discussion on ethics as well as requesting a "blueprint" or ethical guidelines. One hunting-magazine editor says that readers expressed such a strong interest in ethics that this request had been formalized by the Swedish Hunting Association in a project that ran 2013-2014 (R2). A second editor reports "feeling the ethics talk" at all

corners of the hunting community, which he wants to capture in his magazine (R2). A third editor reveals that push for ethics talk is continuous, inasmuch as subscribers often write the editorial board with inputs and opinions about what was OK to publish and what not in terms of topics, trophy shots, language use, and hunting stories (R3). A few editors also note knowing one another, having written for each other's magazines in the past, and conducting a dialogue on ethics as an informal editorial community: "we have different profiles, but we can still hold a discussion about what to post" (R9). "Ethics start already at the selection of cover images. Never feature dead stuff. [...] [W]e talk about these things increasingly and I think about ethics more and more the older I get" (R10).

There is consensus among the editors interviewed that what constitutes ethics — and what comprises "jägarmissighet" (hunterlike behavior) — is subject to change. A blueprint for ethical conduct would hence be difficult to present. One editor maintains the term would be a difficult sell in their magazine, associated with finger-pointing around propriety. He notes it is primarily a word he associates with hunting associations when they represent hunting to the outside. "I don't dislike the term," he says, "but it's used as a bat ... it's imprecise and really a matter of personal opinion" (R1). Rather than comprising a clear set of rules, editors all suggest that, first, it is hunters' discussions (and feedback to editors) that set the standard for what is ethical and not and, second, that although hunters may not think of themselves as conducting these sorts of discussions at present, they indirectly do so: "there's an ethical discussion, but it's not usually understood in terms of ethics," an editor suggests (R2), indicating that it recurs through other topics.

Another editor claims that framing articles as ethics pieces is not conducive to selling magazines, but that raising unethical or taboo-laden issues as per other topics is an increasing occurrence (R3). Yet another editor recalls raising an ethics topic, for example, at the end of his recent editorial on wolf hunting, when he addressed the issue of shooting animals at too long a range. "Sometimes you just gotta speak up" (R9). Nevertheless, editors also emphasize that framing such issues in terms of jägarmissighet is problematic as the term is vague. "Really, you either say something is illegal or unethical (R1)," with the implication that hunterlike behavior is an unhelpful concept to facilitate ethics discussions.

On the forum robsoft, hunterlike behavior is similarly problematized as a concept capturing ethical conduct. Two users agree on the vagueness of the term, one of whom even suggests "a discussion is needed" on its exact meaning, but concludes their post

saying it is also difficult to criticize standards of hunterlike behavior since they “come from your own perspective and they can usually motivate their conduct in terms of their own code of conduct. Ethics and morals are, at heart, personal” (Robsoft, thread: “Piglet with class 1 jägarmässigt?” 2016-04-06). This is also confirmed by a hunting-magazine editor, who says “People think what they think, and there’s not a lot you can say or do about it” (R1). This reveals a paradox: ethical conduct needs to be discussed, and at the same time there is no point to discussing it, since it is a personal matter.

**1.2 Opening up for scrutiny.** Despite this, a plethora of articles and forum entries point to the danger of closing off ethics discussions by relegating them to the personal domain. “We’ve got to be honest and criticize ourselves” (Robsoft, thread: good article on hunting photos, 2014-12-03). The same user expresses concern over the fact that shutting down such discussions for fear of offending other hunters and the public “will come back to harm us in the long run.” In the thread, discussion continues with agreement from another user that “we need to be able to tell each other when a line has been crossed, and we need to take the fact that our ethics may be questioned” (2014-12-03), which forms the consensus across several users, e.g. “Our problems should not be locked away in echo-chambers. Put it all on the table and discuss and improve!” (2014-12-04).

In an article titled “What can a hunting rifle look like?” (*Svensk Jakt*, nr. 7, 2015) the author declares that “hunters need to embrace self-scrutiny” (58). Further, ethics are seen to “contribute to a better picture of hunting” (*Svensk Jakt*, nr. 5, 2015, 60). It is stressed that hunting “can stand up to scrutiny” (Lewander, blog, 2017). On *jaktojägare’s* news media website, one argues “the ethics question needs to be attended to” (Ljung, 2017-05-06) and that emerging issues involve necessary reviewing of ethics (Ljung, 2017-04-20; Ljung, 2017-07-31). The forum features posts that reiterate the importance of such “reviewing” conversations.

One user, however, suggests that ethics discussions are more fruitfully held on the level of “big” or “soft” issues than “whether or not the 6.5 is a suitable caliber for moose” (Robsoft, thread: ‘Very Interesting Reading’, 2016-06-18). The user suggests that it is the responsibility of the Swedish Hunting Association to raise broader societal questions of modernization and their impacts on hunting ethics, “like how we can integrate non-Swedes, how we manage urbanization, ethics and so on. It’s great that we’ve started to discuss things like that.” Two editors stress the governmental mandate of the Swedish Hunting Association in prompting more ethics-instructing articles: “they feel the pressure, and they’ve always been good at raising ethics discussions because of it” (R4),

but they also note that hunting education in Sweden needs to play a part in schooling new hunters in ethics.

**1.3 Hunters speaking up about poor conduct.** In “Failing Ethics and Shoddy Macho Ideals” (*Svensk Jakt*, nr. 10, 2015), “Landowners and Hunters Agree on Ethics” (Sanchez, 2015?), and “Hunting Shop Boycotts Trapping Business” (*Jaktjournalen online*, Jonson, 2016-04-29), it is noted that hunters themselves are also ethical gatekeepers. In a recent news article on *Jaktojägare*, the importance of informal control is stressed when it comes to bear hunting, noting that even state agencies prefer to rely on hunters themselves to keep unethical practices at bay (*Jaktojägare*, Moilanen, 2015-07-06, “Hunters look over bear hunting”). This is confirmed in multiple news entries and in the editors’ interviews, where one for example describes hunters as “peer police” and “vanguards of ethics,” especially, one magazine editor argues, moose hunting teams who take rules of right and wrong very seriously. One respondent who works with hunting photography and film-making notes how hunters “rear” one another by continuously pointing out errors and learning from peers (R6).

It becomes clear that there is ongoing dialogue about standards for propriety in photography, in particular. “Ethics begin with the choice of the cover image” (R10). Editors note readers feeding back about unethical photos on covers, including an unlawful collar on a dog (R1), a duck shot in mid-flight (R2), a dead rabbit (R3), and more. This is the most intuitive way of initiating ethics talk with several respondents, as hunting photos now reach a large sector of non-hunting media, and the choice of object, composition, and editing of the hunting tableau represents the human-wildlife values of hunters today. Talking about ethics is described as a necessary mechanism also to “clean up in hunting internally” (*Svensk Jakt*, nr. 12, 2014, 46), with the implication that ethically problematic and/or contaminating types of hunters, hunting, and photos are weeded out by ethical gatekeepers. The responsibility to talk about ethics, or policing ethical conduct, is further presented as a “collective” one, involving the engagement of “self-criticism” in other articles (*Svensk Jakt*, nr. 10, 2015). This is called “self-sanitization” by two respondents (R1, R8).

**1.4 From anthropocentric ethics to ecocentric.** In older magazines, ethics are occasionally problematized. For instance, there is an attempt to define “hunterlike behavior” in the article “A Shooting Bench in the Woods,” in which the principal sign of hunterlike behavior, rather than being tied up in the “big questions” (such as calls from recent voices on the forum), is said to be “always firing with the best possible support for your rifle” (*Svensk Jakt*, nr.1. 1993, Holmgren). “Good sportsmanship” is credited

with shooting skill (*Jaktjournalen*, nr. 6, 1971, 16), or even attributed to the chase energy exhibited by hunting dogs (*Jaktmarker & Fiskevatten*, 1975, nr. 2, 34). Indeed, a leading ethics themed discussion in magazines from the 1960s centers on the use of the newly emerging technology on telescopic sight as being unsportsmanlike, insofar as it tips the balance too far in favor of the hunter. This is despite the fact, as one hunting editor notes in an interview, that such technology ensures safer kills. An editor maintains his magazine “always had an ethics discussion, but it’s a whole different ball game today with new challenges facing hunting, new gear, a whole different technology” (R9), suggesting this has brought ethics to the foreground in recent days.

In older magazines, ethics are characterized as “coming from one’s father” rather from discussion (*Jaktjournalen*, nr 9, 1971, 3). “Moral” is featured ironically in an article on hunting profiles, where the author levies thinly veiled criticism toward too-territorial hunting types who appeal to violated “hunting morals” when an unleashed dog encroaches on their land, or through the mere sight of another hunter (*Svensk Jakt*, nr.1. 1993, Lindevall, 42). Interestingly, research suggests Swedish hunters have detached ethics from old concerns of jealousy, territory, boundary transgressions, and ownership disputes (von Essen “The impact of modernization”), which feature prominently in the older magazines, either under the theme of ethics or in discussions that deal with right and wrong (see e.g. *Jaktjournalen*, 1971, nr 11. “Shooting Another’s Game,” 10-12; *Jaktjournalen*, nr. 4, 1971, “Whose Moose?” 39; *Jaktjournalen*, 1978, nr.1, “Winter Hunting in Poland.” 16; *Jaktmarker & Fiskevatten*, 1967, nr. 10, “Three Episodes from September Hunt in the North”). While the latter research conveys the impression that a majority of hunters are generally happy with this development, citing among other things that ethics can now start to be about the “real” issues like wildlife welfare, rather than mere bickering among neighbors over territory, one forum user also laments the erosion of private property as an institution (Robsoft, thread: “new times, new ethics?,” 2015-10-20).

**1.5 Presentation of hunting to the outside world.** In the older issues of *Svensk Jakt*, ethics discussions feature not just in boundary and social disputes but also regarding the presentation of hunting to the outside world. In “Ethics and Morals in Jakttid,” a reader’s entry renounces the poor portrayal of hunting on a popular primetime TV show which has just aired an episode featuring poor tracking efforts, alcohol consumption, and a preoccupation with money and trophies. Importantly, he writes that that the episode “could have been an interesting and a good contribution to the debate and hunting ethics here as well as abroad” (*Svensk Jakt*, nr. 3, 1993, 78), showing some signs of wanting to problematize ethics. Indeed, his main line of critique is that

the TV show presenter failed to raise these as issues, instead portraying them as par for the course in hunting.

This discussion is carried forward in the next volume (*Svensk Jakt* nr. 4, 1993) where the editors note that they have received “a large number of letters” from hunters who are similarly disappointed with how hunting ethics are portrayed on the TV show (29). Among other things, this intertextual piece presents the criticisms of a reader called Fransson, who insists hunters are more ethical than portrayed here. Even some (albeit rare) articles from 1960s magazines express growing concern over the portrayal of hunting to the non-public, noting how hunters need to conduct themselves with “humanitarian and hunting-moral [jägarmoraliskt] consideration,” particularly of animals that the public media is fond of covering, citing a troublesome case of bear hunting that showed “tremendous ruthlessness and poor judgment” on the part of hunters (*Jaktmarker och Fiskevatten*, 1967, nr. 10, 443). Nevertheless, the main impression is that topics which raise the need to talk about ethics are much rarer in older magazines, even if ethical issues are still indirectly discussed when hunters quarrel over territory disputes or best shooting practices. Explicit calls to self-criticize do not generally surface in these magazines.

## **2. Best in class: nationalism and pride over Swedish hunting ethics.**

**2.1. *Pride.*** As potentially contaminating forms of hunting and hunters enter the hunting community, an increasingly salient discourse found in hunting media is the defensive elevation of Swedish hunting ethics above those of other cultures. This is manifested in newfound pride over hearty hunting traditions that take their basis in utilitarian meat-based, rather than sport, hunting. Pride is also expressed over Sweden’s public access to land and relatively strong influence of hunters and landowners on hunting policy throughout history. In recent magazines this is occasionally accompanied by nostalgia toward the past. “A hearty portion hunting will” of the old days, for example, is contrasted against the technified character of hunting in a 2016 *Svensk Jakt* article titled, “Technology and High Ethics” (Nr, 9, 2016, p. 82). Even in articles covering other topics (like portraits of different hunters in Sweden) a sense of pride is articulated about the Swedish way of hunting, noting how “Sweden is probably one of the world-leading countries in terms of hunting ethics” (*Svensk Jakt* nr. 5, 2015, p. 60). Swedish ethics are described as “something we should be proud of and protect!” (Editorial, *Svensk Jakt*, Hultnäs, 2017-09-03).

Some editors explicitly push the Swedish or Nordic orientation to their magazines, rarely featuring depictions of hunting elsewhere in the world. “My view is you should keep it as Nordic as possible, but this varies from editor to editor. It’s our profile” (R9). Only one editor specifically emphasizes the international dimension: “our idea has been to raise our gaze across Swedish boundaries, because people do travel more and more.” (R10). At the same time, he adds, Swedish ethics are superior to those in many parts of the world. The implied virtue of Swedish hunting is attributed to among other things a tradition of loose dog hunting, where ethics have been high both for the treatment of dogs (*Svensk Jakt*, Ljung, 2017-07-31) and for wildlife (*Svensk Jakt*, Ljung, 2017-05-03). Editors recall questionable hunting practices by foreigners on Swedish soil, “like Italians who will accidentally shoot a dog and it’s no big deal to them,” and declare that by international comparison “I get the sense the ethics here are a whole lot higher ... on everything from safety to what you can and cannot shoot” (R9). “As a Swede you’re so used to high ethics but it becomes clear when you travel abroad that things aren’t the same standards. They don’t have tracking dogs on stand-by” (R10).

In “Ethics Front and Centre” in *Svensk Jakt*, a representative of the Swedish Hunting Association is interviewed to proudly declare that Sweden is world-leading in terms of having 48,000 tracking efforts every year, as done by hunters. Seminars are devoted to praising and encouraging “voluntary efforts” under the nationalistic-sounding “Swedish Wildlife” project (*Svensk Jakt*, 2017, nr 2/3, p. 18). In a blog entry at *Svensk Jakt* (“Hunting Ethics Equals Society’s View on Hunting,” 2015-04-18) by Fredrik Widemo, Swedish hunting enjoys high acceptance by the non-hunting public because its regulation is built on “freedom with responsibility” on the part of hunters, giving rise to “the best hunting law in the Western world.” Websites are awash with similar entries, stating how “Swedish is a fantastic hunting country” (Rydholm, *Svensk Jakt*, 2017-02-21), with a “long and liberal hunting tradition to be proud of” (Daniel Ligné quoted in Jonson, *Jaktjournalen*, 2016-08-18). Apart from such declarations featured in the context of reacting against changes in law, they also feature prominently within topics that problematize questionable shooting or trapping practices. Live-capture traps of wild boar, for instance, are opposed with the accompanying assertion that “this is not how it’s done in Sweden [...] here we work with high ethics” (Jonson, *Jaktjournalen*, 2016-04-29). On the forum, Swedish hunting ethics is discussed in several posts commending “ethics to be proud of today” (Robsoft, thread: ‘the bow-hunting question on the agenda’, 2017-06-10).

In older volumes, Swedish hunting is credited with having grown from a tradition of “folk hunting” (*Svensk Jakt*, nr 6, 1993, p. 40), one in which the influence of regular

hunters and small landowners on regulation and wildlife management has given rise to an internationally distinguishable “order that is conducive to responsibility-taking.” The word “just right” (*lagom*) is also used to characterize the propriety of Swedish hunting as compared international hunters (*Svensk Jakt* nr 1, 1992, “The Grammar School Teacher Who Hunts Just Right,” p. 66). Magazines from the 1970s and 1980s also feature such sentiments, citing “the uniqueness and responsibility” of Swedish hunting practices and ethics (*Jaktjournalen*, nr. 11, 1971, p. 16). An article from *Jaktmarker & Fiskevatten* from 1969 sanctifies Swedish dog hunting by contrasting it to “The shocking English fox-hunting. We smile at the extraordinary snobbery of this and are shocked by the undeniably high measure of animal cruelty it usually brings” (“Fox without a Shot,” 1969, p. 682). The principal trend is that a romantic-nationalist discourse has always been present, but recent articles draw more frequent and explicit links between Swedish hunting as virtuous and responsible compared to the ethics of non-Swedish hunting cultures.

**2.2. (Self-)critical voices.** It can be noted that the forum discourse on the topic of traditionally Swedish ethics turned up more self-critical notes, with some users questioning the idea of a homogenous Swedish hunting ethics in the first place (Thread: “Bear Hunting in Russia,” Robsoft, 2010-12-20). Among other things, two users assert “if Swedes are now supposedly world-leading in terms of ethics, morals and common sense in hunting, I’d sure as hell like to know who gave us that title?” and “It’s enough of a mess in Sweden — ethics vary heavily from north to south.” This is affirmed by expert interviews with hunting editors, one of whom candidly reflects on discrepant ethics across the country (R3). Another concedes “we’re not world-leading in everything even if we think so. There are things one can learn from abroad, like sustainable ‘trophy’ kills” (R10).

It is also emphasized (R7, R8, R10) that a key component of the ethics discussion in the future will have to be vulnerability and self-criticism on the part of hunters, including a preparedness to also discuss misfires, wounded kills, and unsavory things “that happen to every hunt. It’s not just a success everytime” (R10). Journalists note it is important also not to hide this in photos or hunting stories, so that hunters generally become better at reading about and addressing difficult aspects of hunting to tell the full story.

As contended, one of the leading words associated with the unique Swedish hunting ethic is the term “hunterlike behavior” (appearing as “jägarmässighet,” “sportmannamässigt,” or “sportsligt” [approx. “sportsmanlike”]) appears more rarely, in older magazines, and is far less tied to a typically Swedish ethic than the term

“hunterlike behavior” today (see e.g. *Jaktjournalen*, nr. 1, 1971, p. 44; *Jaktjournalen*, nr1., 1986, p.39). On the online forum, the term hunterlike behavior appears as an adjective to the following words: tone, position, conduct, precision, caution, level, harvest, order, spirit, moral, action, challenge, shooting position, and even clothing attire.

Consistent with the greater reflexivity and self-criticism of the forum, enabled by the candid peer community, posts also problematize the term “jägarmässig” in the context of Swedish ethics, such as by noting “what is meant by jägarmässig depends on who you ask” (Robsoft, thread: “Piglet with class 1 jägarmässigt?” 2016-04-06). Also in older magazines, albeit to a more limited extent, this is occasionally raised in relation to different standards for different game coming down to “a matter of taste and preference” within hunterlike behavior (*Jaktjournalen*, 1980, p. 16). On the forum, there is an interesting tension between, on the one hand, the more nationalist discourse of valuing the integrity of a Swedish hunting ethic, and, on the other hand, criticism toward closing off Swedish hunting and its ethics as a sacred institution compared to other cultures. For example, in the thread “Very Interesting Reading” (2015-06-18), users argue over arbitrary distinctions between “real” and “improper” hunters, with one user suggesting we need to abandon such terminology and belief in the uniqueness of Swedish hunting in order to “welcome more people into hunting. Diversity enrichens. Multiculti [sic] and all that...”

**2.4. Swedish hunting ethics on the international arena.** From the early 1990s volumes of *Svensk Jakt*, references to Swedish hunting ethics are present, but less explicit. When they occur, it is usually in conjunction with concern about Sweden’s then-ascension into the EU and the infringements that hunters fear will accompany this union. One article stresses the importance of defending the Swedish hunting ethic upon entry into the EU (*Svensk Jakt*, nr. 4, 1992, “All hands on deck for EG,” p. 18): “we certainly have nothing to be ashamed about in Sweden [...] hunting ethics, wildlife care, regulation and hunting training are all top notch internationally” (citing J.O. Petterson). It can be noted, however, that in five consecutive volumes of *Svensk Jakt* from 1993 — the year before the referendum — reports on hunting experiences by Swedish correspondents in Italy, France, Germany, Spain, and Poland are carefully presented (“the EG series”) and serve to dispel rather than reproduce prejudices readers might have about hunting ethics in these countries.

Indeed, in contrast to today’s discussions on the trigger-happiness and occasional elitism of, e.g., southern European hunters to differentiate these from Swedish hunters

coming from a proper meat tradition (R1, R2, R3, R5, R8, R9, R10), these articles speak relatively highly as to the wildlife management standards of Italy and Spain.

It is notable, also, that older magazines feature concessions like “When it comes to wildlife management we Swedes quite have a bit to learn from many European countries, particularly when it comes to hunting culture” (*Jaktjournalen*, nr. 11, 1971, p. 37), and even articles titled “Can Sweden Learn from Yugoslavian Hunting?” (*Jaktjournalen*, nr. 4, 1971, p. 7). Hunting trips and articles from other parts of the world were much rarer in older volumes; as one editor explains, “I think the whole editorial board went to Alaska to hunt at some point in the 1970s, but that was it” (R9). In magazines published after Sweden’s ascension into the EU, when there is more contact with other member states and hunting exchange globally, there is a sometimes more critical tone toward foreigners’ hunting, either in their countries or visiting Sweden (*Svensk Jakt*, 1998, nr 2/3, “No Hunting Prohibition for Foreigners,” p. 23), not to mention criticism of the EU as a central institution infringing on Swedish hunting traditions and rights with its restrictive “bureaucracy driven” politics (*Svensk Jakt*, 1998, nr 2/3, “Bloodbath in Brussels,” p. 32). A magazine editor suggests that the ethics divide is far stronger between Swedes and non-Swedes, even other European hunters, than it is among classes of Swedish hunters (like upper-class, working-class). He argues it is enough “just to get down to Spain or Hungary” to encounter unethical hunts (R3).

**Discussion.** This paper began by pointing to an increased need on the part of hunters to make transparent the ethics that inform their codes of conduct with wildlife (von Essen, “Whose Discourse?”). Previously unhelpfully relegated as belonging to a private domain, perhaps as a legacy of Leopold’s consecration of hunting ethics as an introspective exercise in moral relativism, there is a growing recognition that wildlife is a public good and cannot be governed purely on the basis of private whims. It demands at minimum a self-critical discussion among hunters about their ethics. The seeds of such a discussion are now sown, although they are usually motivated by the self-preservation of hunters in the face of new environmental regulation and infringements on rights (Hanna), embodied in the principle freedom with responsibility.

That said, the process of opening up to such discussions has been agonizingly slow, if hunting news media, social media, and expert interviews with magazine editors are to be believed. Up until the last five years or so, hunting media have not been preoccupied with discussions of ethics in any direct sense, that is, in framing discussions in terms of ethics or pointing to the importance of having such dialogue among themselves. This scarcity of ethics talk may be due to a range of factors: such articles are seen as

commercially unviable for the independent magazines; as finger-wagging by the association-linked magazines; and as encroaching on the personal values of individual hunters who, after all, have their own moral compasses. As was suggested in the introduction, there has also been resistance with regard to interviewing hunters about their ethics or, as I suggested to be more methodologically sound, surveying their discussion forums for ethics talk. In this way, this study marks a contribution to exposing ethics talk.

Insofar as magazines from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s feature mentions of the words “ethics,” “moral,” or “hunterlike behavior,” they use these words to characterize poor standards in concrete cases of hunting and shooting, and not on the meta-level of problematizing what they mean for hunters. The terms describe propriety of conduct in relation to respecting boundaries, avoiding disputes with neighboring hunters, but also when to shooting skill and style. Compared to today’s coverage, which features more ethics in relation to animal welfare directly, the old hunting ethic is comparatively anthropocentric (see also Van de Pitte). This seems entirely plausible; the constituent features of hunting ethics likely do change so as to better resonate with the moral values of the general public (Gill). In this study, this is partly evidenced in the shift from ethics referring to human standards of propriety to ethics referring to wildlife welfare and ecocentrism, a prominent discourse in public consciousness and policy today (Eckersley).

It is also probable that values around animal welfare and animal ethics do not disseminate one-way from the public to hunters, but that the public is also *influenced by hunting values* in a dialectical relation. This may be in two ways: one, hunters are members of the public, and in their diverse roles as husbands, CEOs, celebrities, or teachers, they constitute part of the discussion in the public. Indeed, inasmuch as hunters are singled out as a unit for analysis, they are a *community of practice* (Widlok) and *not of totality*, occupying diverse roles.

Second, hunting values are making their way into the public. For the latter half of the 20th century, the popularity of hunting was on the decline, parallel to growing environmental awareness and animal rights activism (Franklin). As such, in many places, hunters were seen as deviant and backward (Vitali). Today, however, modern alienation from the countryside, from the means of production, from animals, and from self-sufficiency have precipitated an upswing for hunting in many western contexts (von Essen & Hansen). Hunting gains status as reconciliation with nature, as spiritual and psychological fulfillment, and as a more humane and responsible means to food

consumption in modern society (Cahoone). This means that the hunter is often presented to urban publics as a role model or wildlife expert.

The interesting finding is that despite previous research's assertions that hunting ethics are private and situational, hunters have always shown a strong predilection for comparing themselves and their morals with those of others, which hints at some readiness to discuss hunting ethics. Reflected clearly in media articles, this is a tendency that is observed also in the hunting scholarly literature (Bell et al.; Colomy & Granfield; Fischer et al.; Silvy et al.), although, again, not understood as an exercise in reflexivity over ethics per se. Modes of differentiation by hunters from less ethical categories of hunters feature in the media across decades, including imparting divides in ethics between local and tourist hunters, upper-class and working class hunters, and more.

It is significant that in older magazines, a higher proportion of such comparisons are drawn between classes of Swedish hunters *internally*. Often jokingly, typologies of different hunter profiles are made: the slob hunter, the meat hunter, the city-boy hunter, and the gearhead hunter (see also Jensen for such typologies in the literature; Wade). In today's media, by contrast, differentiation occurs increasingly on an *international axis*: Swedish hunters as compared to trophy-hunting Germans, pompous French bird hunters, ruthless English fox-hunters, and crazy redneck North American hog hunters. Swedish hunters thus take care to distinguish themselves from hunters of what they see as less ethical cultures (von Essen et al.). With globalization, it is hardly surprising that there is more contact between Swedish hunting styles and those of foreigners, prompting assertions of national identity.

The relative "defensiveness" around championing a traditional Swedish ethic in contrast to foreign ethics can certainly be challenged. One body of scholars regards local pride by hunters as everyday sense-making, letting off steam, coping, and building solidarity (Boonstra et al.; Heley; Watson). I suggest, however, that this repeats the unfortunate tendency of previous hunting research to depoliticize ethics and relegate hunters' discussions to the private domain, instead of understanding them as *partly political in nature*. They are political in the sense that they are collective responses of hunter self-preservation at a time of external challenges. Much like populist calls to e.g. "Make America Great Again," this particular element of hunters' ethics discussion has counterpublic and conservative dimensions against change and modernity (von Essen & Allen, "A reluctant right-wing social movement"; von Essen & Allen, "Taking prejudice seriously").

This gave rise to the second interesting finding: the re-activation of a traditionally Swedish hunting ethic in recent years (von Essen & Allen, “A reluctant right-wing social movement”). Recent media now promulgate the term “hunterlike behavior” as a typically Swedish virtue. It is likely that this phenomenon is a response both to modernization processes and globalization forces that imprint on hunting culture and risk homogenizing it in a “global hunting culture,” and a response to increased regulations facing them (von Essen, “The Impact of Modernization”). To clarify the latter, hunters are now resentful of EU infringements on their traditional hunting rights and its simultaneous toleration of ethically questionable forms of hunting in other member states. In response to this, it is not surprising that they have defensively activated a norm around Swedish ethical hunting. This phenomenon can be observed also in the context of Swedish forestry at the moment, where the Swedish ethic of “freedom with responsibility” is increasingly called upon to stem the tide of recent environmental regulation (Löfmarck et al.).

If freedom with responsibility was a mantra, its manifestation was hunterlike behavior. The media analysis showed this term to be simultaneously opaque and potentially empty rhetoric. Critical voices on hunting social media, not yet reaching the levels of published news media, have begun to direct critique toward this development and the problems associated with the term, as did one hunting editor. Future research should critically uncover this term and what it means to different people in different contexts, so as to save it from being an empty signifier. The hunters that already question its meaning form an important bastion of reflexivity. They are actually beginning to conduct this discussion themselves in a new communicative arena online. Such platforms are of critical importance, as previously the only dialogue associated with hunting was understood to be that between the hunter and “nature” (Reis).

There are two aspects to such ethics discussions that can be distinguished going forward. First, the dialogue hunters maintain within their own ranks and, second, the dialogue they conduct with the general public about wildlife. It seems that the former is a prerequisite for the latter to be held. Hence, hunters first need to cultivate processes and platforms to hold internal discussions. Finally, we can for analytical utility consider more explicitly what Bergmann calls the modality of a code [ethic] — referring to the historical context and the framework that makes the ethic coherent and intelligible. With the current intellectual climate described as hostile toward hunting (Parker) or, in Sweden, at least more skeptical than fifty years ago, we can infer that hunters’ propensity to talk about ethics changes. Critical voices suggest ethics become a mere façade through which hunters legitimize violence (Kheel; Peterson), but hunting

scholars insist codes of conduct imposing restrictions of hunters have existed since the days of Kublai Khan, when hunting was universally acceptable (Swan).

Ethical discussions also become increasingly important in modernity in the context of the normative uncertainty facing people (Löfmarck et al.) and the erosion of authority in their lives. The erosion of authority is reflected clearly in the lack of trust toward the EU in governing hunters or telling them how to hunt, a theme that runs through post-2000 magazines. The growth of autonomy, individualism, and self-expression values in modernizing societies meanwhile (and as a contrast to this) (Inglehart & Baker) also point toward increased reflexivity on the part of, for example, hunters to consider their ethical standards and what kind of hunters they want to be, explaining the rise in ethics talk across their ranks. From this perspective, future research might investigate ethics policing also as a form of signaling and identity work (Bird & Smith).

Finally, even if we can get hunters to communicate their ethics, we must expect this process to be something of an internal battle of different ethics in different corners of a diverse hunting community. Certainty, as this study shows, there are also dissenting critical voices within hunting to whom ethics are more or less important and tug in a variety of different directions. Indeed, rather than a cosmopolitan hunting community emerging, there is arguably increased hunter specialization and value-pluralism today. Hunting becomes a site for differentiation, so that gearhead sportsmen and population cullers separate from trophy hunters and gentlemen bird shooters by way of different ethos (Svendsen Bjørkdahl). One anticipated danger of holding discussions within such a diverse and internally segregated community is that different profiles of hunters and sub-communities will try to lay claim to the “true” hunting ethic, and, as evidenced here, use it as the benchmark against which to condemn other hunting practices as slob hunting (Kuentzel). Against this, hopes of finding an ethic that is “logically consistent and intuitively appealing” to the general public (Peterson 310) says nothing about the challenge of first agreeing on ethical baselines within a heterogeneous community of practice.

**Conclusion.** Through a six-decade media analysis of hunting press, the latter itself evolving to encompass new communicative arenas online, this study has found an increased willingness on the part of hunters to problematize ethics relating to wildlife, environment, and propriety. Discussions may appear to be cynically motivated, as if to ward off detail regulation and ensure hunters continue to enjoy freedom with responsibility in how they go about their activity. But hunters also indicate genuine concerns over animal welfare and sustainability that is testament to them not just

defending themselves to the public, but being products of the values and animal welfare paradigms that shape public consciousness. The most striking finding was arguably that a key constituent of ethics talk today involves emerging forms of *peer policing in virtual arenas*, entailing greater scrutiny of practices and values of new as well as old hunters. Compared to older days, ethics seemed to be more or less accepted as coming as a ready package “from one’s father” and there was perhaps less opportunity to challenge authority — be it in father figures, official hunting associations, or policy. Today, by contrast, modernization involves emancipation from authority and greater reflexivity, which is reflected in ethics talk.

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