Fleischman: This is awful O’Connell. How could you do something like this?

O’Connell: You eat meat don’t you Fleischman? Well, say hello to meat.

Fleischman: This isn’t meat. This is a majestic animal living by its wits in the wild.

O’Connell: Was a majestic animal living by its wits in the wild. What do you know about majestic or wild or even animals for that matter? Oh, unless of course we’re talking about thoroughly demoralised animals living huddled behind bars in an urban zoo.

Fleischman: There’s a moral imperative involved here O’Connell.

O’Connell: Oh really, what is it?

Fleischman: For a person to derive pleasure out of causing the death of a vibrant living thing – that is ethically wrong. Not to mention morally repugnant and personally reprehensible.

O’Connell: What do you know about it Fleischman? You know nothing. You think life is an intellectual construct: A set of deeply held personal beliefs that has absolutely nothing to do with reality as we know it out here in morally reprehensible Alaska.

Fleischman: Okay, explain this to me. Really, I want to know. What gives you the right to be a murderer of animals for your own pleasure?

O’Connell: My hunting license.

This is the exchange that takes place between two characters, Maggie O’Connell and Joel Fleischman, at the beginning of an episode entitled 7: Hunted: Recreational Killing.
'A Hunting We Will Go', from series 3 of the highly successful 1990s television comedy drama *Northern Exposure*. Maggie has returned from a hunting trip with a ‘ten point buck’ strapped to the back of her station wagon and is challenged by the town doctor, Joel, a New Yorker who has been sent to the small isolated Alaskan town of Cicely to fulfil a four-year placement obligation. Joel’s struggle to fit in with the lifestyle, customs and traditions of the townspeople forms the main premise of the series, and ‘A Hunting We Will Go’ follows his experiences as he attempts to understand the motivation to hunt. The programme explores some of the established positions within the hunting debate, but in fulfilling the generic conventions of a closed structure and reinstated equilibrium demanded by a comedy drama series narrative, it has to arrive at a negotiated position by the end of the episode. The programme was targeted at an audience who, based on demographic profiles, would have been unlikely to support hunting, and the episode steers a course through the various arguments that continue to inform current debates. Attitudinal surveys on hunting during the 1990s indicated that ‘there is no such thing as a general public. Opinions on consumptive wildlife-related activities vary dramatically among segments of the American public’ (Duda & Young, 1998, p. 600). What is interesting about this episode is the way in which it traverses these varying opinions, and in doing so the narration reframes Joel’s objections to hunting by the end of the programme. This chapter unpicks the arguments about hunting that are presented in *Northern Exposure* and other media texts. The aim here is to examine how the discourse of pleasure and a ‘good death’ is negotiated, normalized and reinforced.

**Making the case**

The *Northern Exposure* episode, ‘A Hunting We Will Go’, mirrored public debates about hunting in the US in the 1990s. A decline in the hunter population from the 1980s onwards was, at the time the series was broadcast, being blamed on social shifts, an aging population, increased urbanization, increased costs associated with hunting, over-regulation, the influence of animal welfare and rights organizations and negative media stereotypes of hunters. Attitudinal surveys suggested that whilst a majority of the American public strongly approved of legal hunting, more than a fifth of the population disapproved (Duda & Young, 1998, pp. 590–591). The reasons for their disapproval varied, but studies showed that certain social groups were more likely to oppose hunting than others. There was, for instance, a correlation between education