



Citation:

Dashper, K (2017) Listening to horses: Developing attentive interspecies relationships through sport and leisure. *Society and Animals*, 25 (3). pp. 207-224. ISSN 1568-5306 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685306-12341426>

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:

<https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/1217/>

Document Version:

Article (Accepted Version)

The aim of the Leeds Beckett Repository is to provide open access to our research, as required by funder policies and permitted by publishers and copyright law.

The Leeds Beckett repository holds a wide range of publications, each of which has been checked for copyright and the relevant embargo period has been applied by the Research Services team.

We operate on a standard take-down policy. If you are the author or publisher of an output and you would like it removed from the repository, please [contact us](#) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Each thesis in the repository has been cleared where necessary by the author for third party copyright. If you would like a thesis to be removed from the repository or believe there is an issue with copyright, please contact us on openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Listening to horses: Developing attentive interspecies relationships through sport and leisure

Katherine Dashper

Abstract

The involvement of nonhuman animals in human sport and leisure raises questions about the ethics of animal use (and sometimes abuse) for human pleasure. This article draws on a multispecies ethnography of amateur riding in the UK to consider some ways in which human participants try to develop attentive relationships with their equine partners. An ethical praxis of paying attention to horses as individual, sentient beings with intrinsic value beyond their relation to human activities can lead to the development of mutually rewarding interspecies relationships and partnerships within sport. However, these relationships always develop within the context of human-centric power relations that position animals as vulnerable subjects, placing moral responsibility on humans to safeguard animal interests in human sport and leisure.

Keywords: ethics; horses, interspecies relationships; multispecies ethnography; sport

Introduction

Over recent years there has been growing academic interest in critically examining human-nonhuman animal relationships and questioning how we, as humans, should think about, treat and care for the animals that make up important elements of our day-to-day lives. Whether as pets, working partners, farmed species, tourism attractions or elements of sporting competitions, animals play important roles in human social relations, and so the nature of human-animal relationships in a variety of contexts warrants serious and sustained consideration. Even though animals have been used in sport for centuries there has been limited sociological consideration of the roles that animals play in human sporting worlds. Although dogs, birds, fish and other animals feature within sporting practices, the most common animal to play a role in human sport is the horse. This article focuses on the world of amateur horse-riding in the UK to consider how human participants in this subworld (Crossett & Beal, 1997) think about and relate to their horses, and the implications this has for the development of interspecies relationships developed through equestrian sport and leisure.

The role of the horse in human societies can be traced back centuries, and, as Rossdale (1999, p. 4) argues, although the dog may usually be seen as man's (sic) best friend, the horse can be described as "man's most willing and co-operative animal companion". Horses were essential to the development of human societies throughout most regions of the world, playing key roles in agriculture, transport and warfare. For centuries, the horse was a symbol of freedom and power and closely linked to cultural understandings of manliness and masculinity (Edenburg, 1999). With industrialization, advances in transport and agriculture and the mechanization of warfare, the role of the horse has changed profoundly. Over the course of the twentieth century the horse shifted from a work animal to a role more closely associated with leisure, sport and tourism, particularly within western contexts (Crossman & Walsh, 2011). The role of the horse in human societies has thus undergone dramatic transformation within a short period of time, and this has altered the basis of the horse-human relationship.

Equestrian sport encompasses a wide range of sport-related activities including formal competitions (such as dressage and show jumping), trail riding and natural horsemanship (see Brandt, 2004; Bryant, 2008). As such, equestrian sport is part of

the wider institution of sport which is characterized by competitiveness, notions of fair play, the quest for success and issues of inclusion and exclusion. Sport, widely construed, raises numerous ethical issues regarding the morally correct ways to behave, how to treat others and relationships with the self (see Eitzen, 2012). These issues are all relevant within equestrian sport. However the inclusion of horses raises additional questions related to animal agency, human-horse power relations and human treatment and obligations towards horses within sport, amongst many other issues.

This paper begins with a discussion of how we might conceptualize human-animal relationships within sport and leisure in ways that recognize the autonomy of animals and the possibility of developing 'interspecies etiquette' through sport (Warkentin, 2010). After outlining the method of the current study I go on to use data collected with amateur riders in the UK that illustrate various ways in which humans within this sporting world try to navigate their relationships with their horses in ways that recognize the individuality and subjectivity of their equine companions. I finish the paper by considering if and how it may be possible to develop attentive interspecies relationships within sport, and the implications this has for how we think about, organize and practice sport.

Conceptualizing human-animal relationships in sport and leisure

Sport is a human-defined activity, and animals taking part in sport do so as a result of human will and are made to conform to human expectations of which the animal has little awareness. This leaves open the possibility for exploitation of the animal, and examples of abuse make for shocking headlines and frequently result in calls to reassess how we use and abuse animals for our pleasure (Fennell & Sheppard, 2011).

However, as Jonsson (2012) argues, although using animals in human sport opens up possibilities for abuse and exploitation, it does not follow that this animal involvement is inherently unethical and morally indefensible. The position taken in this paper is that animals, including horses, have the ability to feel pain and pleasure and are conscious beings with a moral status independent of their relationship to humans. Humans thus have direct duties to animals in their care (including animals used in sport) on the basis of the animal's inherent worth, as well as the animal's

worth in relation to human activities (Cooke, 2011). This makes the use of animals in sport problematic but not morally indefensible. It *may* be possible to develop human-animal relationships within sport that recognize the subjectivity of the animal partner. How such relationships may develop, and the implications this has for both human and animal participants, requires careful consideration and exploration.

A key concept here is that of agency. If, as suggested above, animals cannot give informed consent to their participation in human sport, does this mean that nonhumans have no agency and cannot act with intention within sport? Although some people continue to argue that nonhumans are incapable of exercising agency as a result of their incapacity for rational thought and language, there is growing acceptance that agency is better understood as a continuum along which all animals – human and nonhuman – are situated (Shapiro, 2006). Although nonhumans may not be capable of fully understanding and acting upon moral principles, in the way that most human adults are, many nonhuman animals do display degrees of intentionality in their behavior (Pearson, 2013). As Shaw (2013, p. 156) argues, “it seems that animals often *do* with a purpose, even if that purpose’s relation to human historical purposes might appear opaque” and thus animal agency is something that needs to be recognized and considered, even if this requires expanding or changing our human-centric notions of what agency is.

Carter and Charles (2013) draw on Margaret Archer’s relational view of Agency to develop a sociological understanding of nonhuman agency that recognizes that animals are not simply passive victims of human-animal relations. Rather, animals can and do act in intentional, directed ways, but this agency is always in relation to others and to what other agents want to do. As nonhuman animals are situated within a human-centered social order, they are enmeshed in social and cultural relations with humans that impact on animal agency. Animals can choose to interact with humans or ignore them, to act or not to act in different situations, but these choices are bound by the human-centric context in which these interactions take place. As a result, agency is always relational, contextual and variable and animal agency is always limited by animals’ historically- and socially-specific positioning in relation to humans (Carter & Charles, 2013).

Therefore animals can exercise some degree of agency within their interactions with humans and the examples offered below provide some pertinent illustrations. This suggests that although animals used in sport are in a position of subservience to their

human partners, this does not automatically imply exploitation of the less powerful equine partner (although the possibility for exploitation is always present). Shaw (2013) suggests that horses are in a master-servant relationship with humans, and that this places horses in a superior position to many other animals. Although the horse, through extensive training, must do what his master tells him to do, the master-servant relationship is the kind of social relationship that until recently characterized many human relationships, and implies a limited degree of working together, albeit within a context of unequal power relations (Shaw, 2013). This idea of working together characterizes much of the literature about horse-human relationships which talks about ‘partnership’ (Wipper, 2000) and ‘co-being’ (Maurstad, Davis & Cowles, 2013) with the ultimate aim of trying to achieve “a oneness with the horse, a kind of fluid intersubjectivity” (Birke & Brandt, 2009, p.196). Consequently, although the horse is subordinate to the human rider within equestrian sport, the horse has some agency and the ability to act upon humans, to work together to produce a relationship based around harmony, communication and pleasure (Oma, 2010). Horse-human interaction thus revolves around complex power relationships that are constantly being (re)negotiated and (re)performed, as the examples offered below illustrate.

Developing attentive interspecies relationships in equestrian sport

The potential thus exists for the development of relationships between humans and horses within sport that are based around ideas of partnership, mutuality and respect. However, the potential also exists for exploitation and abuse, as a result of the human-centric values and structures of sport that leave horses vulnerable to the demands of commercialization, the logic of winning at all costs and pressure for quick, quantifiable results (Gilbert & Gillett, 2011; McManus & Montoya, 2012; Dashper, 2014). There is abundant evidence that testifies to the exploitation of horses in sport, especially racing where high levels of ‘wastage’ occur (e.g., Wilsher, Allen & Wood, 2006). However, the focus in this article is on looking for alternative manifestations of horse-human relationships in sport/physical recreation in order to consider if and how human caretakers attempt to build and maintain relationships with their horses that are non-exploitative and recognize equine agency and subjectivity.

One problem that can arise from the use of horses in sport relates to horses' commodity value, which can be very high for well-bred and high performing animals (Dashper, 2014). This in turn relates to the idea of horses as property, which is revealing of the power that the human 'owner' has over the animal (Stibbe, 2001). Animals that do not live up to human expectations, or those that behave in a way deemed inappropriate by their 'owner', are discarded, sold, or euphemistically 'destroyed' (i.e., killed), illustrative of the subordinate position of the horse within the horse-human relationship (Belk, 1996). Irvine (2004) argues that we must take these issues and the potential for exploitation they contain seriously, even when we as individual owners, or sports participants, treat our animals with care and respect. Those animals are regarded as our property, whether we think of them that way or not, and we are free to treat them as we like, barring outright cruelty which is punishable by law in many countries. As a result, Irvine suggests that we must reconsider how we treat animals in our care, even when that treatment appears benign, and question our behavior, attitudes and duties to animals. Bekoff (2008) also suggests that humans need to think more carefully about how we interact with animals, and calls for humans to "mind" them [animals] as their caretakers in a human dominated world in which their interests are continually trumped in deference to ours" (2008, p. T12). Extending this idea, Warkentin (2010) proposes an ethical praxis of 'paying attention' to animals, whereby human actors think carefully about their own embodied position in relation to the embodied position of the animal. For Warkentin, identity and embodiment are always in relation to animal others, as well as human others, and she advocates a "praxis of embodying invitation and choice, and enabling reciprocity and mutual interest in interspecies interactions" as a way of working towards "interspecies etiquette" as a basis of ethical human-animal interactions (Warkentin, 2011, p. 103).

We may thus be able to overcome some of the moral ambiguity inherent in our relationships with companion animals by attempting to become more aware of those animals, by recognizing them as sentient moral beings separate from their status as our pet/horse, and as embedded in social, mutually constitutive relations with humans. Donovan (2006, p. 306) argues for "a dialogical mode of ethical reasoning . . . [wherein] humans pay attention to – listen to – animal communications and construct a human ethic in conversation with the animals". Thus throughout this paper I present examples of horse-human sporting relationships in which the human partner attempts to engage in dialogue with their equine partner, to listen to what the horse is trying to say and to allow for some degree of equine agency and action. The

riders in this study illustrate how an ethical praxis of awareness (Warkentin, 2010) may be developed and embodied within equestrianism and some of the examples offered show elements of Bekoff's (2008) call to 'mind' animals as individuals with deep minds and feelings.

Materials and method

The following sections are based on a multispecies ethnography (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010) which involved interviews with 17 amateur horse owners and riders, and observations at amateur horse competitions and training events in the UK, conducted over a three year period from 2011-2013. I interviewed 15 women and 2 men and met about 40 horses. The gender profile of the human participants is reflective of female dominance of the world of leisure riding (Birke & Brandt, 2009). The ages of participants ranged from 30 to 68, with most being in their 40s and 50s. The world of leisure riding in the UK is dominated by women in this age range and, although not focused upon in this paper, the demographic of leisure riders no doubt has implications for the horse-human relationship as manifest within this leisure subworld (see Dashper, In press). Interviews and fieldnotes were transcribed in full and thematically coded. As the interviews and interactions were wide ranging, a number of themes emerged. For the purposes of this paper I have focused on elements that illustrate various ways in which the human participants in this study talk about, interact with and relate to their horses within this sporting subworld.

Results

Personality and agency within horse-human interactions

The horse is the predominant feature within equestrianism that defines this physical culture and sporting/leisure world. Although professional riders may struggle to maintain focus upon the horse as an individual sentient being, as opposed to a valuable, highly trained yet volatile means of achieving sporting success (Dashper, 2014), the horse is not just a piece of equipment in the same way as a boat is in rowing or a bike is in cycling. Horses, as with all animals, have different personalities and horses will perform differently with different human partners. One of the challenges of equestrianism is to create a bond and partnership between horse and rider as without this, performance in sport and leisure activities will suffer (Wipper,

2000). The participants in this study were acutely aware of their horses as individuals with personalities, likes and dislikes, and the ability to make decisions and play an active, rather than passive and submissive, role in the horse-human partnership.

Sanders (1990) argues that humans often define companion animals as ‘persons’ with whom they share lasting and intimate emotional relationships. This was certainly the case for the riders within this study. All of my human participants were keen to describe their horse’s personality to me, outlining idiosyncrasies and individual likes and dislikes in much the same way as we might describe a human relative or friend. Irene was talking about training her horse and how he would often choose which gait (i.e., walk, trot, or canter) to travel at, rather than her making a decision. “His favorite gait is canter which is an aspect of laziness, probably; it’s his easiest gait, so he could canter on the spot quite happily. Given the choice, he’s in canter”. Betty told me how her 26-year-old horse, Lucy, “gets a little bit excited every now and again, it’s usually somewhere where we normally canter, she gets excited and she likes to go first, in front of the other horses, she really enjoys it”. Orla explained to me how both she and her horse, Seren, disliked formal training – “schooling” – preferring to trail ride instead: “Seren and I we don’t enjoy schooling, we just hate it, I hate it, she hates it, so the combination’s not great, so we just ride out for fun”.

In such ways the horse is imagined as an individual character able to make decisions and express preferences in much the same way as humans. This suggests that within these horse-human relationships the human is not always dominant, making all the decisions and forcing the horse to comply with human will. However, although for many of my human participants knowing what their horse likes and enjoys doing is an important element of their relationship, and most would try and ensure that they developed their daily routines and riding practices to accommodate their horse’s preferences as well as their own, overall the human does remain the dominant partner within these interspecies relationships. Horses were granted a degree of agency to express preferences, but ultimately the human rider would make the key decisions about what the partnership did. In such ways, horses exercise a limited degree of agency, but this is always within a context of human-centered power relations, and the ability of the horse to act or not act is conditional on the human’s response to their actions (Carter & Charles, 2013).

The participants in this study take part in horse-riding for leisure and fun is an important element of this. It was important for many that they felt their horse was

having fun as well as them. To allow the horse to have fun within these horse-human relationships involves the human ceding some authority and autonomy to the horse, sometimes resulting in the horse developing behavior that is contrary to what the human might have wanted, but which is taken by the human as an expression of equine agency and personality. Eloise told me how she decided to take her horse on a circus skills training course to have fun and help develop their relationship as an added dimension of training. She explained

With all my horses I've always enjoyed doing a little bit of everything really cos I think it's just fun to have a go at lots of different things, we did a circus skills training course actually and that was really fun, I just wanted to do it because I thought it would be nice to have a bit of a relationship with my horse and see what he could do, so he can bow and he can lie down and he does the Spanish Step and stuff like that (laughs) and he begs for carrots too which he taught himself and is a bit naughty, he's just so motivated by food! (laughs)

Eloise's horse learned activities with her, as part of the circus skills training course, but he was then able to adapt these skills in other ways to his own benefit (i.e., begging for carrots). Although this development was not instigated by Eloise, and she identifies it as "a bit naughty" she was impressed by her horse's ability to use his skills for his own benefit and she responded to the begging by rewarding the horse with a carrot and a pat, something that was demonstrated to me during the visit. Eloise had allowed her horse to exercise some agency here and to shape their interactions and relationship. In such ways horse and human engage in "collective action" in which each adapts their behavior within the context of interspecies relationships, so as to achieve some degree of co-operative interaction and communication which is mutually rewarding (Sanders, 1990, p. 664).

Many horse trainers might question the wisdom of individuals like Eloise, Irene and Betty in 'allowing' their horses to behave in ways contrary to the human partner's wishes or instructions, and such ceding power may at times lead to miscommunication which may become dangerous for both horse and rider (e.g., Gore, 2004). That said, however, these are at least examples of humans trying to listen to horses, to see them as individuals with preferences, desires and deep

minds, and this may be an important element in trying to develop human-horse relationships beyond relations of dominance and submission.

When talking about pets and companion animals humans often ‘talk for’ the animal, telling stories in which the animal acts as an independent agent and/or metaphorically speaks to the human (Belk, 1996; Charles & Davies, 2008). This was very common in how my participants spoke about their horses and their riding activities. Abigail told me a story of how her horse had helped her out of a difficult situation when out riding. When riding down a narrow path they found their way blocked by a fallen tree. Abigail was ready to turn round and head back the way they had come when her horse intervened.

I was just thinking ‘I’m going to have to turn back here’ when my little mare just nudged her head to one side as if to say ‘look, let me show you’, and I just let my reins go and said ‘what are you trying to show me?’ and she stepped over the log, stopped dead, turned on the forehand, took three strides, stopped dead, did a three quarter turn on her quarters, sneaked between some branches and zig-zagged through all the branches without catching me or herself on a single branch and she was just saying ‘don’t give up, look I can solve this problem, this is how you do it’.

Here Abigail has attempted to listen to what her horse is trying to say to her, to acknowledge that her horse may have something to say in this encounter and to allow her horse to act without human interference (Donovan, 2006). Abigail has embodied an ethos of awareness, enabling her to listen to her horse and facilitating interspecies communication through her human body and her mare’s equine body (Warkentin, 2011). Abigail’s story shows how those interacting with animals on a regular basis learn from animals and often recognize that animals have abilities that are different and, in some situations, superior to human capabilities (Kuhl, 2011). This suggests a human-animal relationship that goes beyond one of dominance and submission, with the result that “a field of intra-action is created by mutual action, becoming and performing” (Oma, 2010, p. 180). Here we have an example of interspecies communication and collaboration in which Abigail embodies an ethical praxis of awareness, surrendering her well-being to her horse, albeit temporarily (Warkentin, 2010).

Ownership, affection and relationship-building

One of the strongest themes to emerge from this study was the love and affection the human participants felt towards their horses. A number of researchers have argued that interspecies affection and love is possible, although this may differ from love between human family members (Haraway, 2003; Cooke, 2011). The ways in which many of my participants spoke about and interacted with their horses revealed deep attachment. When Carrie spoke about her horse her face and voice softened with affection. She described him as “my number one squeeze” and told me how she hoped they would grow old together. Betty talked warmly about “my girls” and Georgie told me frankly “I love her” as she patted her horse’s neck with a big smile. As Irene told me the story of how she got her horse, Flore, Irene’s first horse at the age of 64, tears came to her eyes. She remembers the moment when Flore’s previous owner told Irene “Flore’s not for sale, but I will sell him to you”. As Irene said “that was it, that was the moment, the rest is history, it still make me a bit weepy”. For these women their relationships with their horses are based on real affection and love.

However, although all the human participants in this study spoke with affection and warmth about their horses there were also occasions when the status of the horse as property of the human became apparent and thus revealed some of the complexities and ambiguities inherent in the horse-human relationship as manifest through sport and leisure (Irvine, 2004; Cooke, 2011). Abigail told me how she had bought and sold various horses over the years.

My first horse was a Dutch Warmblood, I kept her for a year, but things didn’t really gel with her, things didn’t quite work out, and I decided it was a bit selfish to have this big Warmblood for me when I had young teenage children, so I sold her and bought what I thought was a family cob . . . I had him for about 6 or 7 years and then I decided to sell him and get something else.

For Abigail, as with many horse owners, her horse had to perform a task – in her case as a family riding horse. When a horse could not live up to those expectations, the horse was sold, illustrative of the liminal position of such animals, on the boundary of family, susceptible to human whims and tastes (Fox, 2006). Irene also

spoke about a horse she had ‘on loan’ with a view to buy which she described as “a funny beast” and “a personality conflict” between her and the horse who she “sent back to the owner because it just didn’t work out”.

However, although Irene’s words can be taken as an example of how horses are subject to human needs and rejected when they fail to meet those expectations, her attitude could be read another way as an embodiment of ‘paying attention’ to animals (Warkentin, 2010). The practice of taking a horse ‘on loan’ prior to committing to buy does reveal the morally questionable practice of seeing horses as human property to be bought and sold according to human will and reinforces the power differential between horses and human ‘owners’ or caretakers. However, it also acknowledges the horse as an individual with different characteristics and attributes to other horses. Rather than just assuming that all horses will be the same, and that a human will necessarily get along with any horse, Irene took the horse for a period of time to see if they got on with each other and could thus begin to develop a longer relationship. She found that her and this horse did not get on well together, and so did not take the horse on and try and force a collaborative relationship. This may have saved both Irene and the horse in question future upset, and even mental and physical harm, and could thus be seen as a morally justifiable position to take. Here the horse is acknowledged as an individual and the complexities of the horse-human relationship are accepted by recognizing that not all horses will get on with all humans, and vice versa. Although the horse is still seen as human property, and thus the horse’s moral status is tenuous, the horse is granted an individual personality and so an ethical praxis of awareness is embodied through recognizing that a particular horse-human relationship is not developing well, and should not be pursued further.

In juxtaposition to this are the moments when horse and rider instantly ‘click’. This happened for Carrie when she went to try out a horse. She explained:

I went down there [to a horse dealer’s yard] to look for a horse and they pulled out two from the field, cos I wanted one to take my side saddle as well, and there was one there with nice long legs that would have been perfect but no, I got on Bruce and I’d been told about his history, and we went round the track and I think we took three steps and I stopped and looked at him and I said ‘this is it, this is the one’, and that was that.

Although resulting in an opposite outcome to that of Irene, Carrie's story also gives agency to both horse and human in the forging of an interspecies relationship. Carrie knew Bruce was the right horse for her as soon as she rode him, and they went on to develop a very close bond, with Carrie introducing Bruce to me as "my baby, my number one", and Bruce responding by nuzzling into her. Here, it is the "*encounter* between humans and animals . . . that forms the relationship" (Oma, 2010, p. 180, *italics in original*) and it is through this idea of interspecies interaction that we can see the importance of trying to understand the horse-human relationship as a form of embodied co-being (Maurstad, Davis & Cowles, 2013). Although not equal partners in the relationship, both horse and human play a role in forging that relationship (or not, as with Irene), and it is through what Birke, Bryld and Lykke, (2004, p. 174) describe as "a kind of mutual becoming" that the horse-human partnership can be formed through sport and leisure in ways that are not exploitative to the less powerful partner in the relationship, the horse.

Discussion

Involving animals in human sport and leisure raises questions about the ethics of such animal involvement in human pleasure. In relation to horses, who feature in a wide variety of different human sport and leisure practices, the ethical issues are considerable. As Jonsson (2012) points out, horses cannot give informed consent to their involvement in sport and so there is an element of coercion involved, an unequal power relation between humans (who voluntarily choose to be involved, and are aware of the rules of engagement) and horses (who do not have the same freedom of choice, or level of understanding about the activity).

However, although horses are subject to a wide variety of training procedures and sometimes harsh equipment, most people involved with horses realize that it is easier to work with a willing animal, than to try and force such a large, powerful creature to submit to human will. Many riders try to develop a partnership with their horse, through a series of negotiations and the development of trust over time (Keaveney, 2008). When horse and rider do achieve a mutually constitutive state, riding becomes "a form of rapture" (Game, 2001, p. 10). To achieve this, horse and human must train together, learn to communicate, understand and trust each other to form a partnership in which "two living beings, ideally each respectful of the other, are linked in mutual dependency" (Wipper, 2000, p. 57). There is, therefore, the potential

to create an ethical praxis of awareness around horse-riding and the horse-human relationship that is based on a social contract of mutual respect and consideration in which “the human and the horse are in tune together, the relationship is what matters and species are forgotten” (Oma, 2010, p. 180).

The examples given in this article suggest some ways in which this ethical praxis may be embodied in everyday equestrian sport and leisure practices. As the human participants in this study demonstrate, recognizing horses as individual personalities with the ability to act independently may open up possibilities for interspecies communication and collaboration in which the human partner cedes authority to the nonhuman, at least temporarily, accepting that nonhuman animals may have skills, abilities and ways of seeing the world that are different, and sometimes better, than humans (Kuhl, 2011).

However, although the examples offered in this article illustrate some ways in which an ethos of attentiveness, developed through dialogic interspecies relationships, may be developed, such relationships should not be over-romanticized. Although the human participants in this study speak with love, respect and admiration for their horses, and aim to acknowledge their horses as individuals with agency and the power to act or not act as they wish, these interspecies relationships are still developed within a human-dominated framework in which human values take precedence over equine ones, and in which equine agency must be understood in relation to human power (Carter & Charles, 2013). Ultimately, in all of the examples offered above, the human participant calls the shots – *allowing* the horse to act, *interpreting* the horse’s likes and dislikes, speaking *for* the horse, *choosing* to listen.

This illustrates some of the complexities of the horse-human relationship, even when that relationship is developed through thoughtful, attentive interspecies communication, as in the examples offered here (Irvine, 2004). Even when horses are approached by their human partners in a spirit of openness and collaboration, with the aim of listening to the horse and engaging in dialogue, this takes place within the context of human-defined social worlds and constructs (Donovan, 2006; Warkentin, 2011). This means that, even when the human partner explicitly tries to consider their horse’s welfare, personality, agency and personhood within their interspecies interactions, ultimately the master-servant relationship positions the horse in a less powerful, potentially vulnerable position, and places additional

obligations and responsibilities on the human to safeguard the horse and try and act with their interests in mind (Shapiro, 2006; Carter & Charles, 2013; Shaw, 2013).

These tensions between an ethos of attentiveness, partnership and co-becoming, on the one hand, and human-centric power structures on the other, have implications for how we think about the role of animals in sport, a human activity fraught with unequal (human) power relations and ambiguities between morality, fair play and competitiveness (Eitzen, 2012). In the final section I turn to consider some of the implications of these issues for including animals within sport and for the values and practices that underpin the wider institution of sport.

Conclusions

Sport, as a human social practice, has long been believed to 'morally matter' (Morgan, 2006). Whether as a tool to instill values of fair play, teamwork and leadership or as an arena in which racial, sexual and national tensions come to the fore, sport is a social milieu which raises many moral and ethical matters for consideration and debate and highlights issues of power, equality and inequality (Eitzen, 2012). Many humans have suffered exclusion, marginalization and even abuse within the context of organized sport (see Kelly, 2011). Animals are also vulnerable to such treatment, perhaps more so than any humans, due to animals' inability to speak out to defend themselves and to their subordinate position in relation to human actors and social structures (Carter & Charles, 2013). The vulnerable position of animals in sport places responsibility on humans to protect their interests, in a way similar to that which is expected of human adults in relation to children within sport (Garratt, Piper & Taylor, 2013).

If humans have a responsibility towards animals they choose to involve in sport, the nature of this responsibility needs careful consideration. The discussion developed throughout this article suggests that one way in which this responsibility may be realized is through the development of interspecies etiquette based around dialogue and realized through an embodied praxis of attentiveness which recognizes animals in sport "as complex living beings" (Warkentin, 2010, p. 102) rather than tools for the realization of human sporting goals. Such an ethos recognizes the importance of caring in interspecies relationships, and the sporting world described here is a feminized milieu in which caring and nurturing are socially accepted and valued ways

of being (Donovan, 2006). However, the participants in this study are amateur riders whose involvement in the world of equestrianism may differ from those more embedded within the competitive world of equestrian sport.

Within the more competitive subsections of the equestrian world, such as those related to horse-racing or professional equestrian sport, such an ethos of attentiveness may be more difficult to embody and be less socially valued than within the amateur, leisure equestrian context described here (Butler, 2013; Dashper, 2014). Within competitive social worlds, the pressures of professional sport, commercialization and the need for quick, quantifiable results may make such collaborative interspecies relationships as described here much more difficult to achieve and maintain. Dialogic, attentive horse-human relationships take time to develop, but the ‘microwave era’ of modern sport does not allow time for this, and the masculinized environment of professional sport may devalue caring in favor of winning (Gilbert & Gillett, 2011; Butler, 2013). Consequently, although many professional riders may want to develop the kinds of collaborative, attentive relationships with their horses described by the participants in the current study, professional riders may not always have the time or resources to do so (Dashper, 2014). This points to wider debates around the values of modern sport which, with ever-increasing commercialization, appear to be elevating a win-at-all-costs mentality, which may be to the detriment of marginalized and vulnerable groups and individuals, including women, children and animals.

If we are to involve animals in human sport and leisure then we seek their collaboration in these activities and this should spur us on to question if and how modern sport may need to change, or be reevaluated, in order to ensure that animals and other vulnerable groups are not exploited and abused for the pleasure of some humans. As with human-human interactions, human-animal interactions are contextually specific social relations formed between two sentient beings. In the case of equestrian sport and leisure, human and animal must work together to perform the activities that make up those particular physical cultures. Without either the horse or the human, there can be no equestrianism: as Haraway (2003, p. 12) argues “There cannot be just one companion species; there have to be at least two to make one. It is in the syntax, it is in the flesh.” Thus although there is the potential for abuse and exploitation of horses within equestrian sport and leisure, and the status of horses as human property leaves them vulnerable to human whim, there also exists potential for something much more positive to emerge as a result of this interspecies intra-

action. When the human partner attempts to take on an ethical praxis of awareness in relation to their equine partner, the opportunity exists for “the two participants in relationship to create something that transcends both – a higher order phenomenon” (Birke, Bryld & Lykke, 2004, p. 176).

Through sport and leisure human and horse can become something other, and perhaps more, than they can be individually. As Game (2001, p. 2) points out, people who live, work, play and interact with animals regularly know that “[d]ifferent species attune to each other, *live with and through each other*”. In such ways human-animal interaction through sport and leisure may become not only morally defensible but desirable; an opportunity to transcend everyday human-centric ways of being and experiencing physical culture and social relationships. By (re)considering our responsibilities towards animals that we involve in sport, and by trying to listen to them and be attentive to their needs, we may need to (re)evaluate the values, practices and norms of sport on a wider level in relation to competitiveness, ‘sportsmanship’ and pressure to win. As Bradshaw (2010, p. 410) suggests, “[t]urning an ear to animals is an opportunity to recraft life on this earth” and by listening to animals in and through sport, humans may begin to remold sport in ways less exploitative to all participants – human and nonhuman.

References

- Bekoff, M. (2008). Why ‘good welfare’ isn’t ‘good enough’: Minding animals and increasing our compassion footprint. *ARBS Annual Review of Biomedical Sciences*, Available from http://www.evolveforanimals.org/ARTICLES_files/ARTICLE-BECKOFF.pdf [Accessed August 12, 2014].
- Belk, R. (1996). Metaphoric relationships with pets. *Society and Animals*, 4(2), 121-145.
- BHIC (2009). *Size and scope of the equine sector*. Available from <http://www.bhic.co.uk/downloads/sizescope.pdf> [Accessed March 11, 2011].
- Birke, L. & Brandt, K. (2009). Mutual corporeality: Gender and human/horse relationships. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 32, 189-197.

- Birke, L., Bryld, M. & Lykke, N. (2004). Animal performances: An exploration of intersections between feminist science studies and studies of human/animal relationships. *Feminist Theory*, 5(2), 167-183.
- Birke, L., Hockenhull, J. & Creighton, E. (2010). The horse's tale: Narratives of caring for/about horses. *Society and Animals*, 18, 331-347.
- Bradshaw, G.A. (2010). You see me, but do you hear me? The science and sensibility of trans-species dialogue. *Feminism and Psychology*, 20(3), 407-419.
- Brandt, K. (2004). A language of their own: An interactionist approach to human-horse communication. *Society and Animals*, 12(4), 299-316.
- Bryant, J.O. (2008). *Olympic equestrian: A century of international horse sport*. Lexington, KY: Eclipse Press.
- Butler, D. (2013). Not a job for 'girly-girls': horseracing, gender and work identities. *Sport in Society*, 16(10), 1309-1325.
- Butler, D. & Charles, N. (2012). Exaggerated femininity and tortured masculinity: Embodying gender in the horseracing industry. *The Sociological Review*, 60, 676-695.
- Carter, B. & Charles, N. (2013). Animals, agency and resistance. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 43(3), 322-340.
- Cassidy, R. (2002). *The sport of kings: Kinship, class and Thoroughbred breeding in Newmarket*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Charles, N. & Davies, C.A. (2008). My family and other animals: Pets as kin. *Sociological Research Online*, 13(5), 4. doi: 10.5153/sro.1798.
- Cooke, S. (2011). Duties to companion animals. *Res Publica*, 17, 261-274.
- Crosset, T. & Beal, B. (1997). The use of 'subculture' and 'subworld' in ethnographic works on sport: A discussion of definitional distinctions. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 14: 73-85.

- Crossman, G. & Walsh, R. (2011). The changing role of the horse: From beast of burden to partner in sport and recreation. *The International Journal of Sport and Society*, 2(2), 95-110.
- Dashper, K. (In press, 2015). Strong, active women: (Re)doing femininity through equestrian sport and leisure. *Ethnography*.
- Dashper, K. (2014). Tools of the trade or part of the family? Horses in competitive equestrian sport. *Society and Animals*, 22: 352-371.
- Donovan, J. (2006). Feminism and the treatment of animals: From care to dialogue. *Signs*, 31(2): 305-329.
- Edenborg, N. (1999). Perceptions and attitudes towards horses in European societies. *Equine Veterinary Journal*, 31(S28), 38-41.
- Eitzen, D. S. (2012). *Fair and foul: Beyond the myths and paradoxes of sport*. Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Fennell, D. & Sheppard, V.A. (2011). Another legacy for Canada's 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games: Applying an ethical lens to the post-games' sled dog cull. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 10(3), 197-213.
- Fox, R. (2006). Animal behaviours, post-human lives: Everyday negotiations of the animal-human divide in pet-keeping. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 7(4), 525-537.
- Game, A. (2001). Riding: Embodying the centaur. *Body and Society*, 7(4), 1-12.
- Garratt, D., Piper, H. & Taylor, B. (2013). 'Safeguarding' sports coaching: Foucault, genealogy and critique. *Sport, Education and Society*, 18(5), 615-629.
- Gore, R. (2004). Horsemanship. Available from <http://thinklikeahorse.org/index-3.html#1> [Accessed August 13, 2014].
- Gilbert, M. & Gillett, J. (2011). Equine athletes and interspecies sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 47(5), 632-643.

- Haraway, D. (2003). *The companion species manifesto: Dogs, people and significant Otherness*. Chicago, IL.: Prickly Paradigm Press.
- Irvine, L. (2004). Pampered or enslaved? The moral dilemmas of pets. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 24(9), 5-17.
- Jonsson, K. (2012). Humans, horses and hybrids: On rights, welfare and masculinity in equestrian sports. *Scandinavian Sport Studies Forum*, 3, 49-69.
- Keaveney, S.M. (2008). Equines and their human companions. *Journal of Business Research*, 61, 444-454.
- Kelly, L. (2011). 'Social inclusion' through sports-based interventions? *Critical Social Policy*, 31(1), 126-150.
- Kirksey, S.E. & Helmreich, S. (2010). The emergence of multispecies ethnography. *Cultural Anthropology*, 25(4): 545-576.
- Kuhl, G. (2011). Human-sled dog relations: What can we learn from the stories and experiences of mushers? *Society and Animals*, 19, 22-37.
- Maurstad, A., Davis, D. & Cowles, S. (2013). Co-being and intra-action in horse-human relationships: A multi-species ethnography of be(coming) human and be(coming) horse. *Social Anthropology*, 21(3), 322-335.
- Morgan, W.J. (2006). *Why sports morally matter*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Oma, K.A. (2010). Between trust and domination: Social contracts between humans and animals. *World Archaeology*, 42(2), 175-187.
- Pearson, C. (2013). Dogs, history and agency. *History and Theory*, 52, 128-145.
- Rosddale, P.D. (1999). The role of the horse. *Equine Veterinary Journal*, 31(S28), 4.
- Sanders, C.R. (1990). The animal 'Other': Self definition, social identity and companion animals. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 17, 662-668.

Shapiro, P. (2006). Moral agency in other animals. *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, 27, 357-373.

Shaw, D.G. (2013). The torturer's horse: Agency and animals in history. *History and Theory*, 52, 146-167.

Stibbe, A. (2001) .Language, power and the social construction of animals. *Society and Animals*, 9(2), 145-161.

Warkentin, T. (2010). Interspecies etiquette: An ethics of paying attention to animals. *Ethics and the Environment*, 15(1), 101-121.

Warkentin, T. (2011). Interspecies etiquette in place: Ethical affordances in swim-with-dolphins programs. *Ethics and the Environment*, 16(1), 99-122.

Wilsher, S., Allen, W. R., & Wood, J. L. N. (2006). Factors associated with failure of Thoroughbred horses to train and race. *Equine Veterinary Journal*, 38(2), 113-118.

Wipper, A. (2000). The partnership: The horse-rider relationship in eventing. *Symbolic Interaction*, 23(1), 47-70.