NOTE TO USERS

HUMAN-SLED DOG RELATIONS: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE STORIES AND EXPERIENCES OF MUSHERS?

by

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A thesis submitted

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education

Faculty of Education

Lakehead University

Thunder Bay, Ontario

November, 2008

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-43424-6
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-43424-6

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Connie Russell for her ideas, help, and encouragement throughout the thesis process. After any meeting or consultation with Connie, I came out more excited and motivated about my project. She really is a gifted advisor and I feel lucky for the privilege to have worked with her.

I would also like to thank Dr. Bob Jickling for his thoughtful and thorough readings of both my proposal and my thesis as well as his help pointing me towards several useful resources.

Without the wonderful mushers who took time out of their busy schedules to sit and talk with me about their experiences working with sled dogs, this thesis would never have happened. Thank you all for your time and hospitality (including feeding me meals, traveling distances to meet with me, taking me on tours of your kennels, on training runs, etc.)

And finally, I'd like to thank all the sled dogs I've worked with in the past. The training runs, the winter trips, and traveling together over frozen lakes and snow-covered trails inspired me to delve into the relationships people can share with working dogs. Working with some sled dogs (like Solo, the pups, Rainier, Merlin, and many others) has added richness to my life for which I am forever grateful.

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated the elements and quality of the musher-sled dog relationship. Ethno-ethology, which explores the shared lives that grow up between two species or two complex interacting communities (in this case, humans and sled dogs), provided the conceptual framework. I used a narrative design and conducted in-depth interviews with eight mushers from northern Minnesota and northwestern Ontario. The mushers were asked to contribute ideas through sharing their stories and experiences about working with dogs, as well as sharing art or photographs. While all of the mushers were unique individuals with particular ideas about musher-sled dog relationships, six themes emerged. In general, the mushers stated the importance of getting to know the dogs, their respect for their sled dogs' abilities, the idea of two-way communication that takes place, the importance of trust, the notion of partnership, and they discussed what can be learned through working with sled dogs. In the broader context this study supports other research suggesting humans and animals can engage in interspecies relationships and these can be quality relationships with multiple elements. My research supports the idea that humans can interact with and understand dogs as subjects rather than objects. Ideally, education could incorporate more learning opportunities where animals are seen as subjects or sentient beings. My research also advocates building relationships through direct experience with other animals, both formally within education, as well as informally. When we cannot have direct daily contact with members of another species, it is worthwhile to take the time to listen and learn from the stories of those who do.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Research Description

Until recently, little research was conducted on human-animal interactions. Because dogs and other animals do not use human language, it was presumed that animals and humans could not share a mutual reality (Sanders, 1993). From a scientific and sociological perspective, animals were seen as driven purely by instinct and conditioning, and the assumption was that interspecies interactions between animals and humans were basically one-way affairs (Noske, 1997; Sanders, 1993). More recently, some researchers have begun to challenge and refute this belief, opening up research possibilities that endeavour to understand interspecies relations (Lestel, Bruois, & Gaunet, 2006). For my thesis, I conducted a qualitative study using in-depth interviews in order to investigate the relations between eight different mushers and their sled dogs. The purpose of my study was to explore the interspecies relationships between mushers and their sled dogs in order to discover what mushers believed to be the key elements in, as well as the quality of, these relationships.

My research falls within the field of study known as human-animal relations. I believe it is important to consider the relations between animals and humans as worthy of study. Using a lens of ethno-ethology, my research attempts to "account for the shared lives that grow up between humans and animals" (Lestel et al., 2006, p. 156), rather than simply studying the effect of one on the other. Environmental and humane education both focus on understanding humans and their relationship with other animals and the rest of nature (Bonnett, 1997; Selby, 2000a). My study sheds light on one particular human relationship with another species, that is the relationship between mushers and sled dogs.

By taking the time to explore the human-sled dog relationship, I am helping to create a space not just to learn *about* sled dogs, but also *from* them. Humans share the world with many other species, and along with many proponents of humane and environmental education, I wish to broaden the parameters in education around who we can learn from.

The data for my study was collected through seven in-depth interviews with eight mushers as well as some artifact collection (participants were encouraged to submit photos, art, or writing that epitomized aspects of their relations with sled dogs). Other studies have explored relations between working dogs and humans; however, no research to date has examined the relations between mushers and working sled dogs, making this research especially exciting.

Background

As an outdoor educator for Outward Bound in northern Minnesota, I led youth and adults on winter dog sled/ski expeditions. Through the experience of working with students and sled dogs, as well as raising and training my own sled dogs, I became intrigued by the interspecies interactions between sled dogs and humans. My personal experiences have taught me that the relationships that develop between humans and working sled dogs are complex and can be enriching, dynamic, and valuable. Part of the rationale underlying my thesis topic is my belief that attention and acknowledgement need to be given to this specific interspecies relationship.

The field of human-animal relations is a relatively new field of study (Hines, 2003). In fact, at present, researchers rarely study the shared experiences of humans and animals. Generally the focus is either on animal behaviour where animals are seen as

subjects (ethology), or the effects of animals on humans (e.g., positive impacts of service dogs) (Lestel, et al., 2006). The problem here lies in the fact that no species community is truly isolated. Animal communities often exist alongside human ones and these communities can interact and affect one another. For instance, sled dogs and humans have lived in a shared community for as long as 8000 years (McGhee, 2002). According to Lestel et al. (2006), we need more research "that attempts to account for the shared lives that grow up between humans and animals. Simply studying the effect of the one on the other is not enough" (p. 156).

The field of human-animal relations spans several disciplines and research can be found within biology, psychology, sociology, social work, anthropology, geography, health science, philosophy, and education (Gerbasi, Anderson, Gerbasi, & Coultis, 2002; Hines, 2003; Lestel et al., 2006; Shapiro, 2002). The majority of studies that specifically examine the interactions between humans and dogs seem to fall into two areas.

The first area is the study of dogs as companion animals and service dogs. Many researchers, especially over the last few decades, have studied the effects of the dog-human relationship on humans. This is often referred to as Human Animal Bond research or HAB (Hines, 2003). Wilson and Barker (2003) also refer to this area of study as Human-Animal Interaction research or HAI. HAB research gained credibility and scope in the 1970s and 1980s when the proceedings from several interdisciplinary international conferences that contained HAB research were published. According to Hines (2003), the field has its roots in veterinary medicine, but at present has broadened its scope beyond veterinary medicine and is researched from the perspective of social work, public health, sociology, and psychology. Wilson and Barker (2003) provide a succinct

overview of some of the researched benefits of the therapeutic value of animals for humans in the following quotation:

> A companion animal (i.e., a pet) may reduce anxiety, loneliness, and depression and thus delay onset, decrease severity, or slow progression of stress-related conditions. Pets may serve as a stimulus for exercise, provide social support, and serve as an external focus of attention. They function as companions, social facilitators, and adjunct therapists. Pets are also a source of tactile comfort for all age groups by increasing sensory stimulation while decreasing blood pressure and heart rate. (p. 16)

It is important to note, however, that the research into HAB seems to focus purely on the benefits of human-animal interactions for humans.

The second area of research that considers human-dog interactions falls within the study of dog behaviour, cognition, and social learning (generally pursued within the fields of ethology or psychology). One research team in Hungary, led by Vilmos Csanyi, has published a substantial amount of literature on dogs' abilities that allow them to communicate and work effectively with humans. Put together, they believe their research supports the idea that through domestication over time, dogs may have developed traits that allow them to communicate and interact especially effectively with humans (for examples, see Kubinyi, Topal, Miklosi & Csanyi, 2003; Miklosi, Pongracz, Lakatos, Topal & Csanyi, 2005; Miklosi, Topal & Csanyi, 2004; Pongracz, Molnar, Miklosi & Csanyi, 2005).

Besides these two main areas of research, a smaller proportion of the research into dog-human relations seems to focus on the *shared* interactions of dogs and humans. One example is the work of Sanders (1993, 1999, 2006), who completed several studies that probe the idea of dogs and humans sharing a relationship where both are seen as sentient individuals.

After reviewing a substantial amount of research, I believe there are still some important gaps when considering human-working dog relations. Although research exists that explores police and service dogs used for assistance or therapy (Sachs-Ericsson, Hansen, & Fitzgerald, 2002; Sanders, 2006), many other human-working dogs groups would be interesting to investigate. These include human relationships with avalanche rescue dogs, hunting dogs, herding dogs, water rescue dogs, and sled dogs. The research I conducted on humans and working sled dogs will help to fill part of this gap.

Research Problem/Questions

The purpose of my qualitative study was to explore the interspecies relationships between mushers and their sled dogs in order to discover, through the use of in-depth interviews and the sharing of stories, what mushers believed were the key elements in, as well as the quality of, these relationships. The following questions guided my research:

- What experiences do mushers consider key to human-sled dog interactions?
- What do mushers believe about dogs' abilities for interspecies communication?
- What do mushers say they learn from the dogs?

Rationale/Need for the study

There are four main reasons why I felt it was important to research human-sled dog relations. First, we know that dogs and humans have shared a relationship for up to 100, 000 years (Vila, Savolainen, Maldonado, Amorim, Rice, Honeycutt et al., 1997). Some researchers propose that since wolves and dogs are social animals and have lived alongside human groups for centuries, a kind of co-evolution may have taken place where

both species evolved and learned from the other (McGhee, 2002; Lestel et al., 2006). I believe the deep and ancient ties we[1] have with dogs make studying this interspecies relationship important.

Second, Inuit peoples have been using dogs to pull sleds on the North American continent for at least a century (Morey & Aaris-Sorenesen, 2002). Later, when Europeans began to infiltrate what is now Canada, they learned from First Nations and Inuit peoples, borrowing many customs and techniques, including dog sledding. Dog teams were an efficient way to travel and were used by Mounties, Hudson Bay workers, missionaries, and others (Huntford, 1985; Lyall, 1979; Pryde, 1971). Effectively, dog sledding and working with sled dogs is an important part of Canadian history. Learning about relations between humans and working sled dogs, as in my study, helps to give insight into an important part of Canadian heritage.

The third reason this study is important relates to anthropocentrism. In Western society, the tradition has been to emphasize a dualistic tendency to see humans and animals as separate (Oakley, 2007). Conceptually, anthropocentrism places humans at the centre of existence and animals and the rest of nature at the periphery (Oakley, 2007). Some authors suggest that anthropocentric ideologies have helped lead to the recent speed of environmental degradation (global warming, habitat destruction, pollution, species extinction, etc.) as it is argued, that from an anthropocentric viewpoint, nature is seen as merely a resource to fulfill the needs and desires of humans (Bowers, 2001; Murphy 1996; Postma, 2002; Sandlos, 1998). If this is true, finding ways to disrupt

[1] In using "we" I am referring to humans in a general sense. The papers I've read on dog evolution and/or dog-human co-evolution most often refer to humans in general terms. Studies of dog evolution seem to agree that dogs have been around since ancient times; however, there is still controversy whether dogs evolved at multiple origins ("old" and "new" world) or have a single origin (see Leonard, Wayne, Wheeler, Valdez, Guillen, Vila, 2002 and Vila et al., 1997).

anthropocentrism seem especially warranted. My research disrupts anthropocentric constructs by taking the time to acknowledge and explore the value of interspecies relations. The more-than-human world is important, possessing its own intrinsic value.

Fourth and finally, as an educator I believe that we can learn from not just other humans, but animals and nature as well. One of the intentions of my study is to make room to learn *from*, rather than *about*, sled dogs. Many cultures do not emphasize the human-animal divide as in modern Western cultures. For example, many Aboriginal worldviews see humans and the rest of nature as interconnected, interacting beings (Marker, 2004; Nelson, 1993). In Marker's (2004) description of an Aboriginal view of nature, he writes about how important it is to have a perspective that values relationships rather than dichotomy: "This emphasis on relationships puts animals, plants and landscapes in the active role of teacher and therefore results in a more holistic and integrated understanding of phenomena" (p. 106). By taking the time to acknowledge and explore the shared interactions of mushers and sled dogs (with a view that both parties contribute to the relationship), my study helps to address this need to value interspecies relationships.

Definition of Terms

Anthropocentrism

A concept where humans are considered the centre of existence, holding a place of superior value while animals and the rest of nature are on the periphery. (Bell & Russell, 1999; Nevers, Gebhard, & Billmann-Mahecha, 1997; Oakley, 2007)

Ethno-ethology

A way of studying human-animal relations where both animals and humans are recognized as interacting communities of beings able to influence and relate with each other. (Lestel et al., 2006)

Ethology

"The study of the behaviour of animals living under natural conditions" (Miklosi et al. 2004, p. 997).

Mushers

Individuals who spend time working with and running sled dogs/driving dog teams.

Sled dogs

Dogs that pull sleds over ice and snow by means of harnesses and lines. (Wikipedia, 2007)

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following review of literature, as well as exploring relations between humans and sled dogs, includes a broader look at human-animal relations. I start with a discussion of the present state of human-animal studies in order to ground my own research. Next, I discuss some of the research that explains how humans come to develop their understanding of animals. Included is a look at child development, anthropocentric ideologies, and alternative ways of understanding animals. The next section of my literature review narrows its focus, exploring the research pertaining to human-dog relations. Discussions of humans and companion dogs (pets), working dogs, and more specifically, assistance or service dogs are included. I conclude with a look at the ancient relations that have developed between humans and sled dogs, borrowing from historical accounts as well as contemporary stories. The goal of this review is to situate my own study within the larger field of human-animal relations.

Human - Animal Relations

Research overview

Much of the research into human-animal relations is quite recent (Noske, 1997; Sanders, 1993; Shapiro, 2002). The Western perspective has held for a long time that animals are incapable of social interaction and thus, the study of human-animal relations was deemed a worthless endeavour (Noske, 1997; Sanders, 2003). The historical roots of this view can be traced back to many perspectives including the Judeo/Christian ethic, rationalism and Greek thought, industrialization, and the development of modern

scientific thought (Bonnett, 1997; Murphy, 1996; Noske, 1997). Later in this literature review I discuss some of these in more detail.

For the most part, human relations with animals have become one of domination and utility (Noske, 1997). For example, non-human animals are used for meat, transportation, wool, scientific research, and therapy; many are domesticated and bred to best meet the needs of humans. Historically, scholars have stressed the differences rather than the similarities between animals and humans. For example, Noske (1997) notes an emphasis on nature-culture dichotomies where humans (especially men) have been seen as able to transcend nature, setting "man" apart from animals in a position of superiority while nature has become the "other" and the lesser. Shapiro (2002) shares a similar sentiment about the human-animal divide stating that "the traditional categorical divide between human and other animal beings as an underlying block embodied, for example, in the attribution of the reduced category of 'property' to animals other than humans" (p. 334). This emphasis on the separateness of animals and humans has influenced how animals are researched.

Generally, researchers have studied animals as objects to be understood. An example of this is the practice of studying animals in labs, outside their natural and social environment. Influenced by Darwin, researchers have most often assumed that animal behaviour is based purely on instincts of survival and conditioning. Animals, in this frame, don't have the ability for anything beyond these instincts (Bonnett, 1997; Noske, 1997). From a sociological or behaviourist point of view, because non-human animals do not use language (at least in the way we understand it), and do not possess "mind" (the

ability for internal conversation), they are considered incapable of authentic interactions and social relations (Sanders, 2003).

More recently, this trend has begun to change and researchers are starting to consider and explore the idea that animals are able to think, have emotions, and feel pain, (McGhee, 2002), as well as participate in social relations (Sanders, 2003). If animals are seen as capable of true social interactions both within species and with humans (interspecies), a whole new area of investigation becomes possible. Shapiro (2002), in an overview of human-animal studies discusses how the field of research is growing, and yet remains in the margins of many disciplines including psychology, sociology, geography, and anthropology (to name a few).

There are still many roadblocks to studying human-animal relations. Old ways of thinking die hard. Difficulty obtaining acceptance and funding in a field that is still somewhat obscure is one (Gerbasi et al., 2002). Gerbasi et al. (2002) looked at doctoral dissertations in human-animal studies over two decades. They suggest that although the numbers and frequency of dissertations has increased, in general, the field still lacks "support and recognition from key academic and professional institutions" (p. 345). Another obstacle, suggested by Barba (1995), is that as the field of study is so new, little has been done to evaluate the type and quality of the research being done. Finally, Russell (2005) explores attempts to represent animals and/or nature within environmental education research. While she believes it is important to make room for the voices/experience of other beings, thereby helping to break down the human/animal divide, she also warns about the danger in research of misrepresenting the "voice" of others (whether it is other humans or non-human animals). This is especially important

when researchers are attempting to "speak" for animals that don't "speak" to us in a conventional sense. These obstacles are being tackled and human-animal relations research will grow in breadth, depth, and quality. Studies such as mine add to the understanding of our relationships with our more-than-human neighbours.

How humans relate and interact with animals

There is a burgeoning amount of research looking at how humans and animals interact. Researchers are beginning to study human-animal interactions from many perspectives within many fields. Although I explore human-dog interaction research in much greater depth, the following section will outline some recent studies and ideas regarding the more general relations between humans and animals.

Baenninger (1995) explains human-animal interactions using biological terms such as predation, competition, parasitism, mutualism, and commensalism. Like other researchers, Baenninger (1995) suggests that how humans relate to animals has affected not only the evolution of many species of animals, but also how humans have evolved both culturally and biologically. He uses examples such as how humans organized populations in order to care for domestic animals (feed and protect) as well as how human use of animals for transportation allowed societies to specialize. His main premise is that a co-evolution of humans and many animal species has taken place. He expresses this sentiment in the following quotation:

> Our sense of responsibility, our ability to plan, our sense of territory, our creativity and problem-solving ability, our perception of the limits on our effective capacities to work, travel and communicate with each other were all changed by the existence of animals that helped us. At a more general level, the gradual domestication of animals must have affected human concepts of space, of time, and of what was possible for us to accomplish. In other words, domestic

> animals changed the ways in which human beings think about and perceive the world. (p. 74-75)

Coy (1994) also writes about the possibility that who we are as humans has evolved, in part, through our relationship with other animals. From the perspective of a biologist, she questions the anthropocentric idea that only humans are capable of such things as analytic and empathetic thought and behaviour. She uses the examples from both hunting and domestication to show how perceiving what an animal might be thinking may have helped humans to be more successful, leading humans to develop traits such as analytic thought and empathy. However, she believes this very well could have gone both ways as these traits would have served animals as well (i.e., figuring out what humans are thinking/feeling in order to meet their own needs, such as escaping predation).

I tend to agree with both Coy's (1994) and Baenninger's (1995) ideas that humans probably owe some of who we are to living alongside and interacting with animals throughout our own evolution. However, in modern society, a decreased daily interaction with other animals has been the trend (Weston, 1991). This could change trends in future human evolution. Other authors have concerns about this reduced daily interaction with animal others. For instance, Baenninger asks, "Without the stimuli provided by domestic animals, will the thought patterns, feelings, and perceptions that animals originally engendered remain a part of us?" (p. 75). He suggests that, "The ability to show empathy for other living creatures, to avoid the experience of alienation from the natural world, and to take responsibility for others may well be affected" (p.75).

Due to urbanization and specialization, the lack of daily contact with animals has decreased for many humans. However, this hasn't changed the fact that humans still use

animals for many purposes, such as meat and clothing, as well as medical and cosmetic testing. Knight, Nunkoosing, Vrij, and Cherryman (2003) explored people's attitudes towards how animals are used. Interestingly, they found that most people do not know much (and don't really want to know) about the unpleasantness involved in animal use (for example, using animals for medical testing). Is this perhaps an example of Baenninger's claim that without interacting with animals, humans may become alienated from them, and a loss of empathy for them may begin to occur?

Shepard (1993), too, expresses his concerns over the increased isolation of humans from other animals. He believes strongly that how we come to see and know ourselves as humans is influenced greatly by interactions with animals. He is concerned about how replacing wild animals with domestic ones has (and will) negatively impact human psychological development. To him, domestic animals are biological and genetic deformities of true wild animals:

> The substitution of a limited number of genetically deformed and phenotypically confusing species for the wild fauna may, through impaired perception, degrade the human capacity for self-knowledge. The loss of metaphorical distance between ourselves and wild animals and incorporation of domestic animals as slaves in human society alter ourselves and our cosmos. (p. 298)

Although I don't agree completely with Shepard's argument that domestic animals are simply human-created genetic defects, I do concur with his idea that animals have influence over human psychological development. In the next section I will explore some studies on how interactions and experience with animals play a role in how children develop. Both formal and informal education can influence how children come to develop ideas and understanding about other animals.

How children develop understanding about animals

One thing that seems clear from many of the studies I've read is that experience with animal others affects how they are perceived by us (humans). That is, having some concrete relations with animals changes our perceptions of who and what they are. Two good examples of this are studies by Fawcett (2002) and Ross, Medin, Coley, and Atran (2003).

Fawcett (2002) explored children's perceptions and stories about bats, frogs, and raccoons after only half the children were given a direct experience with these animals. She found that children who were given a direct experience with the animals were less likely to tell stories that contained fear, misconceptions, and overall anxiety and more apt to tell stories about friendship and kinship (especially in the younger group). That we should attend to the "importance of direct experience for positive human and other animal relationships, and the implications of this for biological conservation and environmental education" (p. 131) was one of her conclusions.

Similarly, Ross et al. (2003) argued that the development of folkbiological knowledge could be affected by cultural and experiential background, that is, where the children grew up, whether that was in urban or rural areas or on a Native American reserve (Menominee). Previous studies had indicated that children develop a concept of biology that is initially naïve and anthropocentric (Ross et al., 2003). However, Ross et al. (2003) noticed that these studies had all involved groups of urban children.

Ross et al. (2003) decided to compare the development of folkbiological knowledge in the three groups (urban, rural, Menominee). The study results indicated that, in fact, it was predominantly the urban children who showed evidence of

anthropocentric biological thought. All ages of the Menominee children as well as the older rural children showed evidence of ecological reasoning (the ability to project characteristics of humans from human to animal and characteristics of animals back to humans). The conclusion that Ross et al. (2003) came to was that culture and experience play an important role in the development of folkbiological thought that is ecocentric rather than anthropocentric.

Another study with similar findings was done by Fidler, Light and Costall (1996). They investigated whether having at least two years of experience with a pet (dog or cat) before the age of 18 influenced the interpretation of dogs' behaviours. After viewing video-taped episodes of dogs interacting with a human companion, participants were asked to write about what was going on for the dog. The participants who had experience with pets produced significantly more descriptions of the dogs' actions in terms of, "desires, feeling and understanding than did those with little or no experience of pets" (p. 196). This is another study indicating that living closely with animals can change how animals, and relations with them, are understood.

One final study that attempted to investigate how ideas about animals develop in humans was an ethnographic study conducted by Myers (1996). He spent a year visiting a preschool class in order to observe and describe the interactions (especially the non-verbal ones) that took place between the preschoolers and animals who both lived in, and visited, the classroom. From his study, Myers (1996) suggests that children develop their sense of self, in part, through interacting with animals. He observed that the children were able to adapt and react to the more-than-human animal's body, patterns of movement, as well as the animal's level of arousal (e.g., calm while ferrets are feeding on

a bottle or excited when a dog chases a ball). He states that, "The implications are that for the young child, animals are social others that present intrinsically engaging degrees of discrepancy from human social others; and the child's sense of self takes shape in the available interspecies community" (p. 19).

It seems from the above studies that human development can be influenced by contact with other animals. However, we Westerners live in a society where isolation from, rather than daily experience with, most other species is the norm. Perhaps this has been one contributing factor to the anthropocentric ideas that predominate in modern Western society. A literature review on human-animal relations would not seem complete without at least a brief discussion of anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism influences how we understand, and therefore relate to animal others in Western society.

Anthropocentrism's influence

Anthropocentrism is a concept where humans are considered the centre of existence, holding a place of superior value over the rest of nature (Nevers et al., 1997; Bell & Russell, 1999). Taking this further, Oakley (2007) suggests that when humans are seen at the centre, all other animals are, consequently, pushed to the fringes or the periphery: "[S]pecifically, that it is characterized by a disregard for animal life, and that it involves a corresponding disconnect from animals on the part of humans" (p. 14). There are many roots to this hierarchical value-ordered way of viewing animals. Murphy (1996) suggests one root was the move humans made from hunter foragers to agriculture. Instead of living alongside other animals, humans attempted to wield more control over

nature, domesticating plants and animals. This may have begun a separation of humans and nature, both physically and conceptually.

Another root commonly cited is the early Judeo/Christian ethic. According to some interpretations of the creation story of Genesis, God gave "man" dominion over all life. Noske (1997) gives the example of the Christian Church in medieval times that stressed curbing the "animal" aspects of human nature. Religions such as paganism, where animals and nature were integral to belief systems, were discouraged. Instead it was stressed that nature had neither will nor spirit, emphasizing instead the human/nature divide (Noske, 1997).[2]

Two other roots of anthropocentrism worth noting are industrialization and modern scientific thought. During industrialization, nature itself came to be seen as a machine with machine-like parts. Viewing nature as machine-like removed the focus from nature as full of living beings to nature as objectified machines to be understood (Noske, 1997). Murphy (1996) proposes that the need to objectify nature during the industrial revolution was necessary in order to justify the exploitation of nature as a source of economic resources. Along with industrialization came a move towards urbanization. Weston (1991) suggests that the humanization of environments through urbanization and technology has led to a situation where humans are more and more isolated from other life forms. Consequently, daily interactions that may have reinforced

[2] It is worth noting, however, that while some (like L. White Jr.) have proposed that Christianity may be especially anthropocentric, others argue that there is an environmental ethic embedded within Christian doctrine. Some writers use examples such as the ethic of stewardship (where humans are seen as God's caretakers of nature) or point to Christian role models for environmentalism such as St. Francis of Assisi (Peterson, 2000).

feelings of interconnectedness in the past, rather than a human-other dichotomy, are disappearing.

Science is seen as an authority in Western society today; therefore, how science describes and studies animals has had (and still does have) a significant influence on how humans perceive them (Noske, 1997). After Medieval times, positivist science and experimental design predominated. The study of animals became "equated with an active, probing subject tying to penetrate a passive, inert natural object" (Noske, 1997, p. 55). Evernden (1985) writes about how scientists are encouraged to see animals as mechanistic objects rather than interconnected subjects. He states, "Science also helps perpetrate such ignorance, paradoxically, because it gives us a mechanistic image instead of experience of the animal" (p. 77). This anthropocentric viewpoint is slowly beginning to change. Nevertheless, the various roots of anthropocentrism mentioned here have played a role in how people in Western societies have come to see, and therefore relate with, more-than-human animals.

It is important to note, however, that Western society is only one society and that it is not itself homogenous. There are other cultures and subcultures as well as other philosophical constructs that offer alternative ways of viewing relationships between humans and the rest of nature. In the next section, a few alternative perspectives on human-animal relations will be explored.

Other perspectives

Through my passion for working with sled dogs, I became interested in their history. This led me to literature written by and about Arctic peoples. Much of what I've

read about Arctic Indigenous (and other Aboriginal) relations with animals differs from the Western, more anthropocentric ones.[3] It seems that with regards to humans and animals, the focus is more often on relationships rather than separateness or dichotomy. For example, Marker (2004) writes about how his First Nations cultures see nature as alive, sharing, and interacting with humans. These relationships are considered important and valuable.

Similarly, Nasby (2002) wrote a book about an Inuit artist from Baker Lake, Irene Avaalaaqiaq. Avaalaaqiaq grew up on the land and shares her experiences and traditional beliefs in the book through stories and art. In her stories the divide between humans, animals, and their spirits is blurred. Her art portrays animals and people as well as their spirits interacting. Nasby (2002) writes, "Traditional Inuit mythology describes a dual reality of a physical and spiritual presence in all things, the ability for humans and animals to be one" (p. 49). Rather than a distinct divide, the lines between humans and animals, and sometimes the rest of nature, are all intertwined. Humans are by no means the centre.

Cruikshank (2004), who studies "Traditional Knowledge" of some northern Indigenous cultures, has encountered similar less anthropocentric ways of thinking. Rather than focusing on separateness, beliefs about the human place in nature stress interaction and interconnection: "In a philosophical framework where animals and humans share common states of being that include family relationships, intelligence, and

[3] I am aware that there is a danger here in making sweeping generalizations about the beliefs of other cultures. Just as individuals or groups within Western cultures can have a variety of beliefs, I realize this is true of other cultures as well. I also realize many cultures change over time and that within cultures, there are differences between historical and modern ideas and beliefs. In order to avoid making generalizations about Aboriginal culture, I have attempted to refer to specific writers and contexts, although I realize the danger still exists.

mutual responsibility for maintenance of a shared world, interaction with the physical world is a social relationship" (p. 27). This emphasis on commonalities and experiences that are shared between animals and humans (e.g., family relationships) is quite different than a focus on what makes humans separate and different from other animals.

Nelson (1993) has spent time as an ethnographer, living with First Nations groups in northern Canada and Alaska. Like Cruikshank (2004), he contrasts the traditional hunter/gatherer cultures and their ideas about nature with Western society's more anthropocentric one. He believes traditional peoples have been able to live a more balanced existence with the rest of nature partly due to their daily intimate contact with nature. He believes Western society could learn much from Traditional cultures.

Like Marker (2004), Nelson (1993) found that the Traditional Peoples with whom he lived saw themselves as a member of a larger community. In this community, not only can people learn about animals and nature, but also from them. Like Avaalaaqiaq, Nelson (1993) describes how, amongst the Traditional Peoples, spiritual, as well as material aspects of nature, were an important part of daily life. Animals have spirits and consciousness and with these can strongly influence their human community members. This means that, "All creatures no matter how small and inconspicuous carry the luminescence of power" (pp. 206–207). Nelson (1993) believes that Western society's emphasis on knowledge *about* animals and nature may lack something. From his experience, the Traditional Peoples' focus on a deeper wisdom may have led to a less human-centred perspective and a more spirit-centred one. "But knowledge may not suffice without the balance of harmony, without that state of grace through which the animal reveals itself" (p. 227). He suggests that perhaps by recovering some of this lost

wisdom, physical and spiritual, Western society may be able to regain some affinity with the natural world and a better relationship with animal others.

Like some Aboriginal perspectives, biocentric theorists propose an alternative to anthropocentric ways of viewing animals and nature. Biocentrism is the idea that humankind is intimately bound in with the rest of nature and that all living things have worth independent of their ability to serve humans (Bonnett, 1997). Bonnett suggests that this is not a new ideology; in fact, it has existed historically within Buddhism as well as the organismic view of nature that was prevalent with thinkers during the Renaissance. Elements of biocentrism also seem to underlie some of the Aboriginal perspectives I have described.

A biocentric view recognizes that humans are embedded within the natural world. All life is capable of consciousness and therefore has intrinsic value (Selby, 2000b). A biocentric view also puts focus on relationships and processes rather than stressing separate components. Selby (2000b) suggests that within this viewpoint humans will realize that "our very humanity draws succor from the earth and is diminished as we diminish the earth" (p. 90). Drawing from alternative perspectives such as these, studies that view animals (other than humans) as interacting beings with intrinsic worth can help to shift Western anthropocentric ideas. We can deepen our knowledge, understanding, and relations with our animal neighbours.

Humans and Dogs

Of all the literature on human-animal relations, conveniently for me, human-dog relations seems to be one of the favourites to study. Whether it's because dogs are often

found living alongside humans as pets and companions and so are easily accessed subjects, or whether the depth and quality of the human-dog relationship appeals to researchers, I cannot say. In the next section I have broken research about humans and dogs into three main areas: first, I take a general look at human-dog relations including some discussion on the evolution of the relationship; second, I take a general look at humans and working dogs; and finally, I look at humans and service dogs (as much of the research falls here).

Human-Dog relations

Although social interaction and communication between dogs and humans may be a newer area of research, the history of the dog-human relationship isn't new at all. Understanding our relationship with dogs, I believe, includes understanding the history of this relationship. Haraway (2003) states this well in her *Companion Species Manifesto* that explores the relations and histories of dogs and humans. She believes the shared histories of the two species are not only important in understanding the relationship, but also give insight into other local and global issues:

> Every registered breed, indeed every dog, is immersed in practices and stories that can and should tie dog people into myriad histories of living labor, class formations, gender and sexual elaborations, racial categories, and other layers of locals and globals...Along with the whole dog, we need the whole legacy, which is, after all, what makes the whole companion species possible. (pp. 96-98)

Like Haraway (2003), I believe understanding the history of dogs has value beyond understanding the human-dog relationship specifically.

In exploring the history of dogs, we find recent genetic evidence that indicates wolves are the ancestors of all dogs. Dogs themselves originated more than 100 000

years ago (Vila et al., 1997). We can assume, then, that dogs and humans have an ancient relationship. Because humans lived and worked with dogs while our species evolved, some suggest that rather than simply evolving from wolves by adapting to live alongside humans, dogs co-evolved with humans (McGhee, 2002). McGhee (2002) and others (e.g., Haraway, 2003; Lestel et al., 2006) propose that our society and what we know as "humanness" today could be rooted in having evolved alongside wolves and dogs:

> The biologists who have made their lifework the study of wolves describe an animal that lives in a world of complex social hierarchies, with well-organized co-operative work patterns, finely tuned communication skills, and outbreaks of spontaneous joy…In the course of these generations, wolves transformed into dogs, but did their dogs also transform ancient people into humans? Would archaic humans have developed into such a successful and dominant species if we had not had the opportunity to learn from, imitate and absorb into our cultures the traits and abilities of the wolves with whom we lived? (McGhee, 2002, ¶14, 16)

I think this quotation demonstrates the idea of a dog-human co-evolution beautifully, contesting the more traditional viewpoint that domestic dogs are merely a human creation. Budiansky (1992) also proposes that domesticated animals, including dogs, evolved not purely as the result of human control and influence. Instead, he believes the animals themselves *chose* domestication because it was beneficial for them. He writes that "we were a better deal in an evolutionary sense than life in the wild" (p. 165). Budiansky (1992) suggests the lives of domesticated animals (including dogs) were easier because of their association with humans. He states:

> Domesticates have honed the traits needed to survive in a world that includes [sic] man…Their solution to the problem of survival is testimony to the remarkable resources of the evolutionary process; it is at the same time a humbling testimony to the less than complete control we exert over the world… (Budiansky, 1992, pp. 110-111)

He advocates we take a more humble view about the evolution of domestication.

Similarly, on the theme of dog evolution, Haraway (2003) suggests a need to rethink the separation between biologic and cultural evolution where cultural evolution is usually afforded only to humans and changes in animals over time are seen instead as biological evolution. She states, "it is a mistake to see the alterations of dogs' bodies and minds as biological and the changes in human bodies and lives, for example in the emergence of herding or agricultural societies, as cultural, and so not about co-evolution" (p. 31).

Hare, Brown, Williamson, and Tomasello (2002) support aspects of the theory that humans and dogs co-evolved. They study social cognition in dogs, and suggest that during domestication, dogs were selected for abilities that made them able to communicate with humans. According to this team of researchers, dogs are especially adept at understanding human social cues and that these abilities are not dependent on human rearing or the age of the dog.

Dogs' abilities when interacting with humans, however, seem to go beyond understanding human cues. Csanyi's research team in Hungary found that dogs attempt to communicate with humans too (Miklosi et al., 2005). One of their studies (all of which involve looking at social cognition in dogs and how dogs relate with humans) involved playing tape-recorded messages of dog barks to humans who may or may not own dogs. The humans in this study were able to quite successfully determine what may have elicited the bark (play, anticipating food, intruder) whether or not they owned a dog (Pongracz et al., 2003). In another study, a stranger would place an object in the room when the owner was absent. When the owner returned, the dogs would noticeably indicate the hiding place by glancing back and forth from their owner to the object

(Miklosi et al., 2005). Taken together, Csanyi and his team believe their research indicates that dogs have adapted to living with humans and have developed many unique abilities to relate and interact with them. They also believe that since dogs are social animals, it is important to consider the effects of group members within their social group (humans or other dogs) when conducting dog-related research (Miklosi et al., 2004).

Csanyi's team investigates dog-human relations from the perspective of ethology. Sanders (1993, 2006) takes a sociological approach to studying this relationship. In one ethnographic study, Sanders (1993) spent time observing and talking with dog owners in a veterinary office and in their homes to discover how humans came to see their companion dogs. He found that the humans he interviewed "regard their animals as unique individuals who are minded, empathetic, reciprocating, and well aware of basic rules and roles that govern the relationship" (p. 207). Sanders (2003) further reviewed other studies that looked at the social relations between humans and dogs. One theme that emerged about these relations included humans seeing their dogs as unique individuals, capable of thought and emotion during interspecies social exchanges. Sanders (2003) argues that human relations with companion dogs involve shared culture, friendship, and communication and are "commonplace, emotionally rich, and of significant analytic interest" (p. 421). He believes these are true relations, and not just anthropomorphic assertions of sentimental deluded humans.

Working dogs

Although the relationship between people and dogs may have involved companionship and friendship from ancient times (Menache, 1988), working

relationships have played, and still do play, a role in human-dog relations (Haraway, 2003). Dogs have worked with people in many roles, including hunting and retrieving, guarding, protecting, herding, companionship, rescue (land and water), trail guiding, tracking, guiding for the blind, therapy and assistance, pulling sleds, hauling and packing, fleece, food, and in conquest and war (Haraway, 2002; Johnson & Galin, 1968; Shepard, 1996).

Some authors suggest that working dogs may have a preferred life when compared to pets because they both have a "purpose" and their well-being does not solely rely on the affection, love, or whims of humans (Gilman, 2003; Haraway, 2003). Gilman (2003) suggests that dogs are only happy when they are able to do what they were bred for (i.e., herding, guarding, pulling): "If prevented from the use of his [sic] natural abilities the creature suffers. To supply his wants, and 'love' him, is not enough. No live thing can be happy unless it is free to do what it is built for" (p. 33). However, Gilman's (2002) opinion is not backed up by any facts, studies, or examples. Having worked with sled dogs (working dogs), I would suggest that some working dogs are quite happy with employment, while others prefer, and are content with, a life on the couch.

However, when one looks at the high number of pet dogs disposed of, or in shelters, Haraway's (2003) assertion that working dogs have the advantage of being valued for skill or ability, seems to hold some merit. She contends that with working dogs, "Respect and trust, not love, are the critical demands of a good working relationship between these dogs and humans" (p. 39).

Besides service and assistance dogs (which I will cover in the next section), I found little research looking at relations between humans and working dogs. One

exception was an interesting study by Sanders (2006), who looked at the dog-human relationship when he spent time observing and interviewing police officers in K-9 units. He found that there was significant ambivalence amongst the police officers, and within their training regimes, about whether their dogs were tools (functional objects) or sentient individuals. Sanders (2006) believes that our culture's emphasis of the animal-human dichotomy leads to a belief that animals are "objects one owns and uses" (p. 168). This belief can contradict one's experience with animals. For example, while the officers at times were trained to see their dogs "as basic, rather machinelike organisms" (p. 157), this came into conflict with the experience of living and working with these dogs which alternatively led the officers to see their dogs as emotional, sentient individuals who are reliable partners, members of the family, and who serve as an asset to public relations.

Research into service/assistance dogs

There is a growing pool of research about service or assistance dogs. Unfortunately, this research focuses mostly on how assistance dogs benefit people, rather than about the relations between the two. However, a brief overview of this body of research may still vicariously give some insight into some forms of human-working dog relations.

Sachs-Ericsson, Hansen, and Fitzgerald (2002) carried out an extensive overview of studies looking at the benefit of assistance dogs to humans. The authors divide their benefits into categories. Included are benefits to the body (e.g., lowered blood pressure, lowered heart rates), benefits to activities of daily living (e.g., washing, dressing, climbing stairs, etc.), and benefits to participation (i.e., involvement in life's activities

such as employment, education, relationships, recreation). These are the categories devised by the World Health Organization (WHO) in order to classify function, disability, and health. Within the research to date, the authors generally found that persons with assistance dogs benefited positively in all these areas; however, they suggest that the research needs to include more thorough studies (longitudinal, matched comparison groups, standardized measures, etc.).

Sachs-Ericsson et al. (2002) also briefly reviewed the research into the Human Animal Bond (HAB) between humans and dogs. They found that the research indicates benefits such as safety, intimacy, kinship, and constancy. Other researched benefits reported included improved fitness, decreased anxiety, decreased loneliness, facilitated social contact with others, lower blood pressure, fewer physical visits, fewer medications, decreases in minor health complaints, and less depression, to name a few. Sachs-Ericsson et al. (2002) conclude their overview of the research by stating "preliminary support was found for the conclusion that ADs [assistance dogs] have a positive impact on individuals' health, psychological well-being, social interactions, performance of activities, and participation in various life roles at home and in the community" (p. 270). Their research showed that for the most part, the impact of dogs on the lives of humans, both as assistant dogs and companions, seems to be a positive and beneficial one.

I think it would be interesting to expand this type of research to investigate how humans and assistance dogs interact and communicate. Understanding the *relationships* between humans and working dogs could help to improve the welfare of the dogs and the quality of the interactions. Sanders (2006) proposes that humans face ambiguous perceptions and ambivalent emotions about service dogs. He suggests that the ambiguity

of service dogs being seen as "objects" or "tools" on the one hand and friends, family members, and companions on the other can also lead to inconsistent and potentially confusing training and treatment of the dogs. Although it is excellent for people with disabilities that dogs increase the quality of their lives, I believe it is also important to consider the experience and welfare of the working dogs.

Humans and Sled Dogs

This final section will look at the literature regarding human-sled dog relations. After an extensive review, I found only two peer-reviewed articles that related to my research topic: human–sled dog relations. However, over the past few years I have read many books, papers, and historical accounts that make some reference to humans and sled dogs. Even though these documents are not purely academic, I believe they offer valuable stories and anecdotes about the relations that exist between humans and working sled dogs.

Historical relations with sled dogs

There is some debate amongst archeologists about how long Arctic peoples have been using dogs to pull sleds, as well as how integral dogs were to the life of Arctic peoples (Morey & Aaris-Sorenesen, 2002). Archaeologist Vladimir Pitulko has found evidence that Arctic peoples may have used dogs to pull sleds in Siberia as far back as 8,000 years ago (McGhee, 2002). Alternatively, Morey and Aaris-Sorensen (2002) believe that in North America and Greenland, prior to the Thule culture (the last 1,000 years or so), the use of sled dogs may have been rare. Either way, it seems there is a

consensus that humans have used dogs for pulling sleds for more than 1,000 years, making the relationship between the two species a venerable one.

Inuit legend can offer us another perspective on the history and importance of the human-sled dog relationship. Many legends and rituals show that the sled dog was extremely important to the lives and beliefs of the people who relied on them for travel and subsistence. In fact, several northern First Nations and Inuit groups trace their origins to a canine ancestor (Morrison & Germain, 1995; Savishinsky, 1974). For instance, the Copper Inuit believed that dogs were ancestors of people (Morrison & Germain, 1995). In one particular legend, the girl Kannakapfaluk was married to a dog because she refused to choose a suitor. Her husband (the dog) then took her to an island to live. Together they had many puppies/children. Angry about her situation, she places the puppies in boots and sends them off to sea. Some of the boots land close by and these become the "Indians" who look like people but have the heart of a dog. The boots that drift further become "white men" who are hairy like dogs (Morrison & Germain, 1995).

In their investigations of Inuit history, Morrison and Germain (1995) state, "the Inuit believed that the bond between people and dogs was an ancient one. After all, part of the human race was fathered by a dog, and they occupied such an important place in Inuit culture that is difficult to see how people could have lived without them" (p.72). The importance of sled dogs to the Inuit family of the past can also be evidenced in some of the Inuit rituals. When an Inuit person died, their name would be given to a relative who was born shortly afterwards. In the case where no child was born, that name might be given to a newborn puppy (Jenness, 1991; Morrison & Germain, 1995). Other rituals were also used with newborn puppies:

> A pup's legs were pulled to make them grow strong, and its tail twisted to curve over the back. Its nostrils might be pierced with a pin to give it a good sense of smell, while an arrow rubbed along the belly would make it swift in pursuit. The pup might be tied in a miniature harness so it would pull well, or a weight placed on its back to enable it to carry a summer pack with ease. (Morrison & Germain, 1995, p. 73)

Taking time to perform rituals like these, which are similar to the ones performed on Inuit children, demonstrates that traditional Inuit people valued their sled dogs considerably.

Jenness (1991), who lived with a group of Inuit people from 1913-1916, emphasizes the importance of dogs to the Inuit in the following statement: "The link that binds dog and men [sic][4] is naturally closer than that which binds him to seal or caribou, and so he uses the word kia (who) for dogs as well as persons, but huna for other animals which have no individual names" (p. 443).

Besides the Inuit, sled dogs were historically very important to other people who lived in Arctic and sub-Arctic regions. Before the time of planes, trains, and other automated forms of transportation, dogs were the preferred way of traveling in the winter (Stuck, 1988). Dog teams enabled missionaries, Mounted Police, Hudson Bay and Northwest Company workers, trappers, mail carriers, miners, loggers, and others an effective and indispensable means of transport for as many as eight or nine months a year (Pryde, 1971; Savishinsky, 1974; Stuck, 1988). Because the dog team was so essential, and people spent so much of the year working with their dogs, accounts and narratives I have read often offer insights into the strong bond and relationship that existed between musher and sled dog.

For example, Stuck (1988) wrote a narrative in 1914 about his travels as a Missionary in Interior Alaska over the first years of the 20th century. In his account, I

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[4] While there are many women mushers today (which I know from personal experience), in historical texts I can find little if no mention about women mushing dog teams. However, this doesn't mean they didn't.

found references that give insight into his relations with his dogs. For example, he writes that, "Indeed, any man [sic] of feeling who spends the winters with a dog team must grow to a deep sympathy with the animals, and to a keen, sometimes almost a poignant sense of what he owes to them" (p. 400). It is obvious that Stuck (1988) has both respect for, and gratitude towards, his dogs. He sees his dogs as individuals with their own personalities and also as companions and friends in his travels:

> It takes the close companionship between a man [sic] and his dogs in this country, traveling all the winter long, winter after winter, though the bitter cold and the storm and darkness, through the long, pleasant days of the warm sunshine of approaching spring, sharing labour and sharing ease, sharing privation and sharing plenty; it takes this close companionship to make a man appreciate a dog. (p. 233)

When one of Stuck's (1988) favourite dogs Nanook dies, he spends several pages of his narrative writing about the relationship he had with Nanook and the qualities that made up Nanook's unique personality. The following little story shows Stuck's (1988) appreciation for Nanook, his personality, and his abilities:

> He was my talking dog. He had more different tones in his bark than any other dog I ever knew...Nanook never spoke until the spot was reached on which we decided to pitch the tent. What faculty he had of recognizing a good place, of seeing that both green spruce and dry spruce were there in sufficient quantity, I do not know – or whether he got his cue from the tones of our voice – but he never failed to give tongue when the stop was final and never opened his mouth when it was but tentative. (p. 234)

The above accounts and quotations show how integral and important sled dogs were in the lives of Arctic and sub-Arctic peoples of the past.

Contemporary accounts of the human–sled dog relationship

Contemporary accounts by modern mushers also place a high level of value on the relationship that grows between mushers and sled dogs. In the books I have read,

elements of this relationship that are repeatedly iterated are friendship, trust, respect for the sled dogs' unique talents and abilities, and the distinct personalities of various sled dogs.

For instance, Paulsen (1994) writes about training a dog team to run the 1,000+ mile Iditarod dog sled race in Alaska. The following excerpt shows that Paulsen (1994) sees his dogs as mindful individuals worthy of respect and with the ability to teach him, the human. He is in the process of training them for the race and decides to start living out in the dog yard (kennel):

> This time I didn't go away and it altered the way they [the dogs] felt about me, thought of me and my actions, and changed the way I thought as well – started me thinking right. Started me thinking in terms of dog and not human... "I don't know things yet." An understatement at that. "You guys will have to teach me..." And I realized when I said it that I meant it. What I needed to learn only the dogs could teach me...I had to be with the dogs all the time, learn from them all the time, know them all the time...I had to in some way become a dog. (pp. 90-91)

Olesen (1989), too, in his book about dog mushing shares similar thoughts and feelings about his dogs:

> Through it all, there were the dogs. They were the spark, the magic, in what was at times a tedious and laborious life...I was steadily becoming aware, firsthand, of what these animals could do and of the depth and breadth of spirit they possessed. (p. 31)

> One learns directly from the dogs...Even with a single experienced dog in the team, the driver has a good teacher from whom to learn the ropes. This may sound like a Walt Disney script, but I will stand by it. In the miles we share with our dogs, the evenings we feed them, the mornings we clean their yards and fill their water bowls, the times we together slog through slush, break through thin ice, or struggle with heavy loads in deep snow, the communication and "training" flow constantly in both directions. (p. 33)

From reading contemporary literature about mushing, certain themes seemed to emerge: friendship, trust and companionship, distinct personalities, and respect for sled dogs' talents and abilities. In the findings chapter, as you will see, there were some

similar themes that emerged from the group of mushers I interviewed, as well as other key ideas about human-sled dog relationships.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Research Design

For this research, I used a qualitative methodology. Creswell (2005) suggests that qualitative research is best suited for research where you wish to "learn the details of the complexity of the phenomenon" (p. 45) or "to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon" (p. 203). Because I wished to understand what mushers felt to be the key elements and the quality of their relations with sled dogs, qualitative research best suited my research questions. An in-depth study seeking a rich understanding of the experiences of a small number of participants as in qualitative research seemed most appropriate.

Ideally, I would have used an ethnographic qualitative design for my study. In many ways, mushers are a culture-sharing group and ethnographic research is helpful when you wish to understand the beliefs, experiences, interactions, and communication of a group of people (Creswell, 2005). The idea that mushers share a culture was quite clear throughout my study. I wondered if I would have understood as much of what the mushers were saying had I not at one point been a musher myself. Mushing seems to have its own culture and with it, its own "language" (e.g., terms, words, and underlying meanings). A lot of what the mushers were saying or implying may have been lost had I not at one time been a part of the mushing culture. Unfortunately, ethnographic research is conducted over a long period of time, and in my case, logically would have involved spending significant time with mushers. Due to time and financial considerations of Masters level research, I did not have the time or resources to use ethnography.

Instead, I borrowed loosely from narrative research design. Through interviews and artifact collection I attempted to understand the experiences of a few individuals. According to Creswell (2005), narrative designs attempt to "understand and represent experiences through the stories individuals live and tell" (p. 478). Similarly, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) believe that narrative inquiry is appropriate for certain types of educational research. They state: "The main claim for the use of narrative in education research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (p. 2). As in narrative research designs, I wanted to collaborate with participants, restory their experiences and "analyze the stories by identifying themes or categories of information" (Creswell, 2005, p. 478). Ellis and Bochner (2000) write how in narrative designs, there can be a more open and collaborative relationship between researchers and their participants than in some of the more traditional research methodologies. They believe that using narrative allows the researcher to express a more realistic picture of the true fluidity, diversity, and complexity of social interactions. I was inspired by their assertion that narratives "long to be used rather than analyzed; to be told and retold rather than theorized and settled; to offer lessons for further conversation rather than undebatable conclusions; and to substitute the companionship of intimate detail for the loneliness of abstracted facts" (p. 744).

The conceptual framework that I worked within was human-animal relations. More specifically, I attempted to incorporate a lens known as ethno-ethology. Lestel et al. (2006) discuss the need for a field of study that considers the complexity of interspecies communities comprised of humans and animals, and attempts to account for these shared lives. They believe the social sciences need to develop frameworks that are

common to human ethnology and animal ethology but account for the human-animal associations that occur in complex interacting communities. They propose ethno-ethology as a conceptual approach that recognizes animals are interacting beings and attempts to understand the interactivity of humans with animals. This seemed ideal when the purpose of my study was to discover mushers' perceptions of their relations with sled dogs.

Methods

My data was obtained through in-depth interviews with eight mushers. Initially, I thought my study group might be spread out (across Canada and the United States), and I intended to conduct at least some interviews over the telephone. As it turned out, all of the mushers I interviewed were from either northern Minnesota or northwestern Ontario. I was able to conduct six and a half interviews in person. (One interview I was unable to complete in person as the participant ran out of time, so we conducted the second half by telephone at a later date).

Qualitative interviews involve asking open-ended questions allowing the participants to voice their experiences (and stories) unconstrained by a formal structure (Creswell, 2005). I interviewed the participants using a loosely devised interview guide (see Appendix A). However, according to Seidman (1991), a good in-depth interview is not conducted by strictly adhering to an interview guide due to the fact that the questions asked by the interviewer often evolve during the interview based on the discussion and experience of the participant. For example, Seidman states that in-depth interviewing, "is designed to ask participants to reconstruct their experience and to explore their meaning.

The questions most used in an in-depth interview follow from what the participant has said" (p. 69). Therefore, in my study, through the use of both guided questions and open discussion, the participants were encouraged to share experiences and stories that best represented their relationships with their sled dogs. Although at times the mushers took the interviews in unique directions while sharing stories and experiences, on the whole, we stuck more closely to the interview guide than I had expected. The mushers all agreed to have the interviews tape recorded, enabling me to transcribe them and code them for themes.

I also gave the participants the opportunity to submit artifacts such as pictures, artwork, poetry, or creative writing that they felt offered insights into their relationship with sled dogs. I thought the use of photos, picturing/art, and autobiographical writing might provide another window into understanding musher-sled dog relationships. As an educator, I have found there is more than one way of "knowing," and that understanding something does not necessarily have to be come about through language alone. It's hard to find many references to using artifacts, although Connelly and Clandinin (1990) discuss the use of autobiographical writing and "picturing" as viable forms of narrative data collection and Bogdan and Biklen (1998) spend time discussing the use of photographs as data. I was also inspired by Fawcett's (2002) study where she had children draw pictures as a way to understand their feelings and thoughts about common wild animals.

Using art in educational research is not a new concept. Eisner saw education "not solely as an undertaking of social science but one with profoundly artistic features" as well (Barone, 2005, p.117). Eisner introduced the term *arts-based education research*

(ABER) as a way of conducting research and evaluation in the field of education. With ABER, aesthetics are considered an important component of research (Barone, 2005). Another term for arts based research is A/r/tography, "a form of representation that privileges both text and image as they meet within moments of metissage" (Irwin, 2004, p. 35).

Sample

To obtain my sample, I started with a personal list of contacts that I obtained through my experiences as a musher. From there, I used a technique known as snowball sampling, where participants were asked if they knew of other people who would be appropriate for my study (Creswell, 2005). In fact, if I had interviewed all the mushers suggested by my participants, I might still be interviewing! My plan was to conduct approximately five interviews, but because some of the interviews did not seem as detailed, rich, or long as I had anticipated (probably due to my inexperience as an interviewer), I went on to interview eight mushers in total.

Limitations/Delimitations

One limitation of my study was the size of the sample. My sample was not nearly large enough to be representative. I cannot project my findings about the mushers in my study to the larger population of mushers. Along with the small size came the limitation of regionalism. All of the mushers I interviewed live in northern Minnesota or northwestern Ontario. There may be regional differences between mushers. For example, had I interviewed Inuit mushers in Northern Greenland or mushers from

mountainous areas in Alaska and the Yukon, I may have found quite different stories and ideas.

The method I used to obtain my sample of participants (personal list and snowball sampling) was not objective. However, I feel that knowing some of my participants personally, or through one degree of separation, made for relaxed and therefore richer, more informative interviews.

Another limitation was that I have personal experience as a musher. This personal experience had the potential to bias both my inquiry and findings. I noticed during the interviews that at times, I expected or "wanted" the mushers to say something in particular due to my personal experiences working with dogs. At these times I tried to be especially careful not to lead the mushers in a certain direction, while noting and acknowledging my bias. Conversely, this personal experience seemed to create a situation where my participants were comfortable sharing their insights, due to the fact that I knew them and/or we had the common shared experience of working with sled dogs.

My findings are valid only for the group of mushers I interviewed. However, within this group I was able to describe and restory some of the experiences of eight mushers, discovering elements and themes having to do with their relations and interactions with sled dogs. Perhaps these stories will resonate with others who work with dogs in some capacity, or will be replicated or expanded by future studies with different samples.

Data Analysis

After I transcribed my tape-recorded interviews, I listened to all the interviews again while reading the transcripts. Next I read through the transcripts again, noting key ideas in the right margin. Then I listed all the key ideas from each interview on sheets of paper. Each musher or interview was represented by a different colour. I cut up all the key ideas into strips of paper and started to organize "like" ideas together in piles. In a sense, these "like" ideas became my codes. After much deliberation, I found a way to organize similar codes or piles into significant themes about the musher-sled dog relationship (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I was interested in the individual stories and experiences of each musher, but also in the themes and interconnections between their narratives. Seidman (1991) highlights the advantages of using in-depth interviews to explore and analyze a topic where one might expect both individuality and commonality:

> In-depth interviewing's strength is that through it we can come to understand the details of people's experience from their point of view. We can see how their individual experience interacts with powerful social and organizational forces...and we can discover the interconnections among people who live and work in a shared context. (p. 103)

I think the idea of using artifacts (pictures, drawings, art, journals, or creative writing) submitted by the mushers was a good one. I believed artifacts could enhance the analysis, and would add to a more holistic picture of musher-sled dog relations. Unfortunately most of the mushers didn't really offer much in the way of artifacts. However, there were a few exceptions. One musher was an artist (painter) and gave me permission to use any of the art on his website. Several of his paintings depicted people and sled dogs. Another musher had been featured in a children's book about mushing. The artist for the book had presented her with some framed pictures. She was excited to

give me some photos of this art and when she initially showed me the art in her home, it generated some good discussion about her, her son, and certain sled dogs she has worked with. Besides this, two mushers also gave me some photos of them and/or their dogs. In my findings section, I have interspersed the photos and art submitted by the mushers in places where I felt the pictures enhanced the findings. The art and pictures that I did manage to collect in this study allow for a more holistic representation of the stories and themes, in part, because the data is represented both linguistically and visually.

Ethics

No individual participated in my study without written consent. Participation was voluntary and each participant was given a cover letter and filled out a consent form prior to taking part in an interview (see Appendices B and C). The cover letter explained the purpose of my study as well as the voluntary nature of participation. Also, the cover letter provided assurance that the confidentiality of the participants would be upheld. Participants are not identified and a pseudonym is used in place of participants' names (and in place of dogs' names) in the findings and discussion which follow.

Participating in my study did not pose any risk to the health or well being of the humans or dogs being studied. All subjects were treated with respect, and were given the option **not** to answer any question. It was stated clearly in the consent letter that they retained the option to drop out of the study at any time. I offered the mushers the option of reviewing their transcripts to make suggestions and ensure accuracy; however, none of them were interested in doing so. Several participants were interested in obtaining a summary of the research upon completion. It was also clear in the consent letter that the

transcripts would be stored at Lakehead University for seven years at which time they will be destroyed.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The following section of this thesis describes my findings and has been subdivided into two parts. The first part gives a short overview of each of the eight mushers I interviewed and the second part outlines the six major themes that emerged from the interviews about the musher-sled dog relationship. Interspersed throughout my findings are art and photos that were given to me by the participants. Some of the captions for the pictures (figures) are inspired by key ideas in the findings section; others are direct quotations taken from the transcripts. When I use quotations as captions, I quote the participant who gave me that particular picture. I hope these figures supplement the findings by giving the reader visual representation of some key ideas.

Individual Musher Stories

Each of the eight mushers in my study was unique. One of my concerns in developing themes from the interviews was losing the flavour of the individual narratives. While there definitely were some common ideas held by the mushers, at times a theme emphasized by one musher was given less consideration or a different twist by another. Every musher had distinctive motivations for getting into dog sledding, different reasons for working with sled dogs (racing, tour companies, expeditions, trapline, recreation, and education) and different techniques or ideas about training and working with dogs. I believe the various motivations influenced the mushers' individual ideas and stories. For this reason, in the following section I give a very short overview of each musher who participated, in order to share some of the individual motivations and stories. (I have used pseudonyms in order to ensure anonymity.)

ARCTIC GIRL (AG): Arctic Girl lives just outside a small town with her husband. AG remembers watching local dog sled races as a kid. She and her husband worked at a dog sled kennel as teens. She explained that she was inspired by how friendly all the dogs were and had fun getting to know them. She now has a kennel of sled dogs and she competes in sprint (short distance) and mid-distance races as well as going on camping trips in the local wilderness area with her dogs. She says part of her inspiration is raising dogs and seeing them perform to their potential.

BEN: Ben grew up on a farm and had experience working with animals from a young age. He was 16 years old when he got his first husky and started skijouring [a sport where one to three dogs pull a skier] with the dog. He went on to get three dogs and start a little team. With his first little team he did a lot of camping as he had a real love for the outdoors. He went on to work for a kennel in Alaska that trained dogs to do long distance races like the Iditarod. Today, he and his wife both participate in long distance races with their kennel of sled dogs. He loves the sport of dog sledding, in part because he says he's competitive. But he is also inspired by being out in remote wilderness areas with his dogs, as happens in the long races. Throughout his interview it was evident that he is really into figuring out the intricacies of how best to work with/train his dogs.

LIZ: Liz relates that she "grew up with sights and sounds" of huskies. When she was born, her mom owned 35 sled dogs. However, the dogs were sold when she was young as her mom wanted to focus on raising her children. However, Liz wanted a team of huskies for as long as she can remember. She would even harness the family's border collies and hook them to a plastic sled. Liz got her first small team when she was eight years old and was racing junior races by nine. Today, she does long distance racing with a kennel of dogs she shares with her husband. Liz is inspired to work with sled dogs because she says, "I love training them. I love seeing them grow up from puppy-hood to adulthood and learning. And I love the challenge of teaching each individual dog, always getting better." Not only does she work with sled dogs, but she had many insights into human-dog relations from her work as a veterinarian.

HANK: Hank's inspiration to work with sled dogs comes, in part, from his love of camping, the outdoors and being out in the backcountry. He was a winter camper and backcountry skier prior to becoming a musher. He has diverse experience as a musher including dog training for other mushers, completing multiple sub-arctic and arctic expeditions, owning a tour company and racing his dogs in mid and long-distance races.

TOM: Tom lives off the grid with his kennel of long-distance racing dogs. Most of the stories in his interview revolved around being out with his dogs on the Yukon Quest, a grueling long distance race of 1000 miles between Whitehorse, Yukon and Fairbanks, Alaska. He focuses on adventures and challenges he has had, as well as the extreme and harsh conditions he has faced with his dogs. He has respect for their toughness and athleticism and often commented on the dogs' instinctual drive to run.

ALAN: Alan started mushing through his love for winter camping. He lives off the grid in a remote area with his family. He runs a large tour company that includes several staff. The company takes clients on dog sledding trips (ranging from one day through multiple days). He also does a little bit of racing on the side. In his interview he often stressed the responsibility the musher has to communicate effectively with dogs. He frequently talked about what was expected of dogs and how best to communicate expectations. The attachment he had to a few of his lead dogs came through in the interesting stories and anecdotes he shared about them.

BETH: Beth is the program director for a non-profit organization that delivers educational wilderness experiences. In the past she was a guide/instructor for this same program and took students on dog sled/ski expeditions. Her involvement started years ago when she herself was a student on a dog sledding course. At one time, she also had her own dogs and participated in a four-month sub-arctic expedition with the dogs and three other women. Of all the mushers, she had the most to share about how traveling with dogs offers educational insights. Besides this, many of her stories revolved around individual dogs. Her descriptions of dogs and events showed she believed dogs to be real characters.

KARL: Karl grew up in a remote area. His father and grandfather were both in the logging business. He has always had a passion for the outdoors and as a teen was an assistant on a trapline. He now has his own trapline. He decided to work his trapline with dogs instead of a snow machine in part because he says he's not mechanical. He also says that as an artist (painter) and a romantic, he really likes the idea of traveling the land with a dog team. Besides the trapline, Karl also owns a company that takes people on dog sledding trips. In part, this is how he makes his living. His awe for the beauty of the land and his amazing knowledge of wildlife were evident throughout the interview. He had many stories that included wildlife encounters. He also had some interesting insights into working animals as his grandfather logged with horses years ago. He believes working sled dogs today probably have a better deal than in the past because people have the "choice" to work with animals. In the past they were a necessity and were often treated as machines.

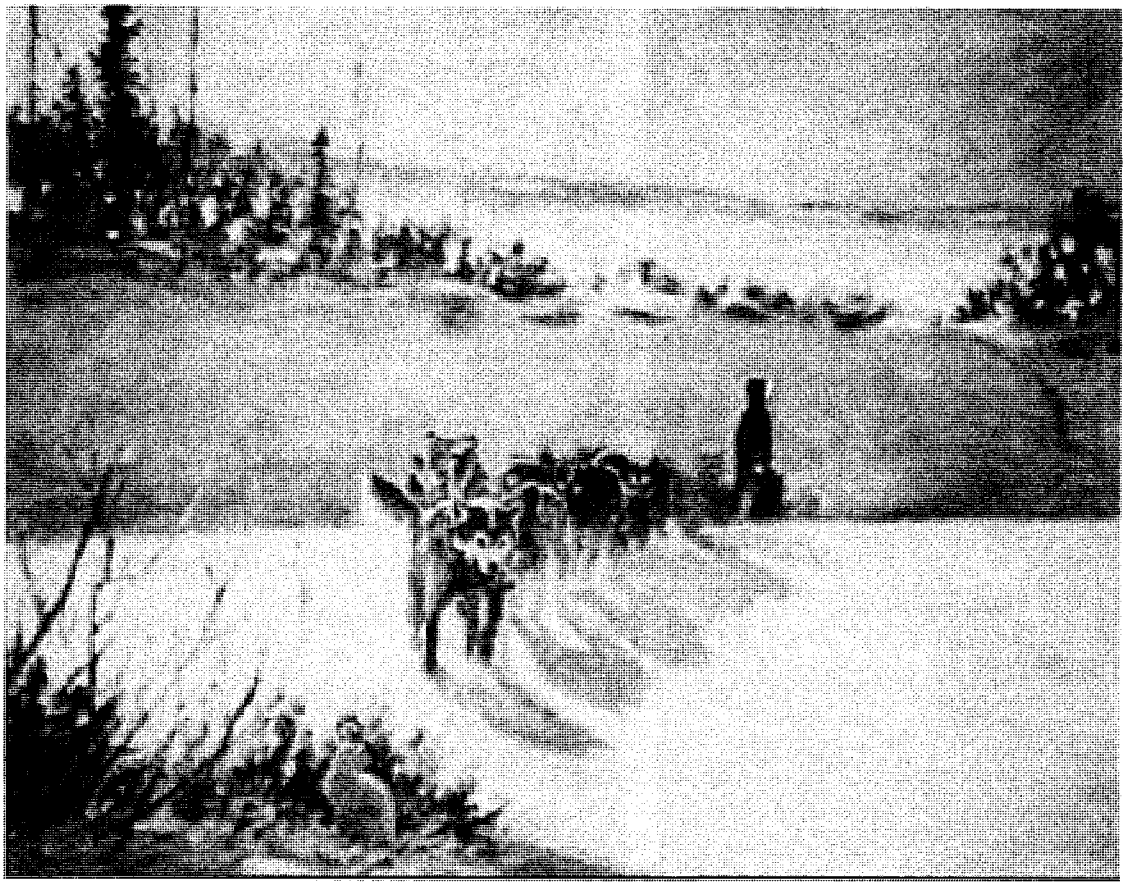

Figure 1: "Everything about it is beautiful...when things are working good." This figure is a photo of one of Karl's paintings.

Musher-Sled Dog Relations: Themes

Six main themes about the human-sled dog relationship emerged from the interviews. First, the mushers believed that their dogs are individuals and to work well with them, they have to get to get to know them. Second, the mushers have a lot of respect for the abilities of their sled dogs. Third, all of the mushers talked about communicating with their sled dogs. They believed this communication was two-way and was dominated by both the idea of reading body language as well as giving off and reading cues. Fourth was the idea that a good musher-sled dog relationship was built on trust. Fifth, the mushers shared the idea of a partnership between two thinking, feeling beings. This partnership involved work on the part of both parties (musher and dog). Finally, the mushers talked about what they learned through working with sled dogs and from the dogs themselves.

Theme one: "You've got to get to know your dogs"

One of the themes that emerged about the musher-sled dog relationship was the emphasis mushers placed on getting to know their dogs. The mushers often stated that a good working relationship was based on really knowing their dogs. I've broken this theme into three areas. First, all of the mushers made reference to the dogs having distinct personalities and being individual characters. Second, the mushers often talked about the importance of spending time and bonding with their sled dogs. Finally, the mushers often spoke "for" the dogs describing their feelings, moods, preferences, or thoughts.

Dogs are individuals with unique personalities. One thing all of the mushers seemed to like to tell stories about was different dog characters. There were obviously

dogs to whom the mushers had a special attachment due to their character or personality. Usually these stories revolved around lead dogs, but occasionally other dogs in the team were mentioned, especially if that dog needed special attention for whatever reason. For example, one musher talked about a dog she felt had Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and focusing problems:

> The only special dog in the whole string was Tempest, and if anything was going on it was because of Tempest. And Tempest, even in wheel[5], he would notice that trail to the right and the left and he was just very creative...He was always looking at trees or birds or...

Like with the story about Tempest, it was clear from the many stories about individual dogs that the mushers felt each dog was unique, possessing an individual personality. For example, one musher said, "Every dog has their own story. Even pups that haven't been raced yet they still have their story and uniqueness that make them special." Another musher stated: "And it's also the individual. You can generalize all you want but you've got to know each individual dog."

When talking about dog personalities, the mushers often made reference to different dogs' preferences, what the dogs liked or didn't like, their motivations and what made them "tick." For example, one musher was talking about how he rewarded different dogs based on that particular dog's preferences:

> And you always have to kind of look at what drives each individual dog. Some dogs are very food driven, some dogs just want a pat on the head, some dogs don't want to be touched but they like other things.

Several of the mushers also talked about personality matches between musher and dog. They felt that they worked better with some dogs based on their personality. For

[5] The wheel dogs run at the back of the team, closest to the sled.

example, one musher explained how he had inherited some of his dogs from another musher:

> And a lot of my really good dogs I got from her because, not because they couldn't physically make her team and mentally make her team, they just had a, you know, a personality conflict.

The same musher, when talking about his favourite lead dog, said, "Yah, and we were really in tune, too, you know?" He felt that he and this particular dog were an especially good fit personality-wise. He lamented how his favourite, most talented lead dogs were growing old and retiring.

According to several mushers, not only do mushers prefer or work well with some dog personalities, but dogs also prefer some people to others. This can be evidenced in the following story about a dog named Sequoia:

> With Sequoia, if he liked you, he would run and be super super happy, and he'd go down the road. With people he didn't like, he'd just get this thought where he could turn the team around, and he'd turn them around and take them home. Anyways, it was musher dependent on what he did. He liked running, but he wasn't going to run for everybody.

According to the musher who told this story, dogs definitely prefer certain people over others.

Besides the personalities of individual dogs, some of the mushers talked about breeds of dogs (Alaskan huskies, Siberian huskies, or huskies with hound in them) or lines of dogs having different personalities. For example, one musher stated:

> Well there's definitely genetic lines that hate me....Like this dog Happy, I got her as a puppy and she's 10 years old now, she's never warmed up to me. She's always disliked me, is leery of me and then I inherited her sister and she was always leery of me, and I inherited her brother and he barks at me non-stop, and he's been in the dog yard for six years now and he still barks at me.

Similarly, one musher felt that the character of the Siberian husky matched his own personality perfectly, stating: "I feel like there is a lot of personality things that just click with certain people and certain types of dogs. For me personally, I feel the Siberian husky is a perfect match for me and just the way I am." Qualities of the Siberian husky that he mentioned included their stoic nature as well as their mental and physical toughness.

Whether it was the more general characteristics of a line or breed of dogs or stories about the antics, characters, and personalities of the individual dogs, it was clear that for the mushers, dealing with different personalities is a key part of working with sled dogs.

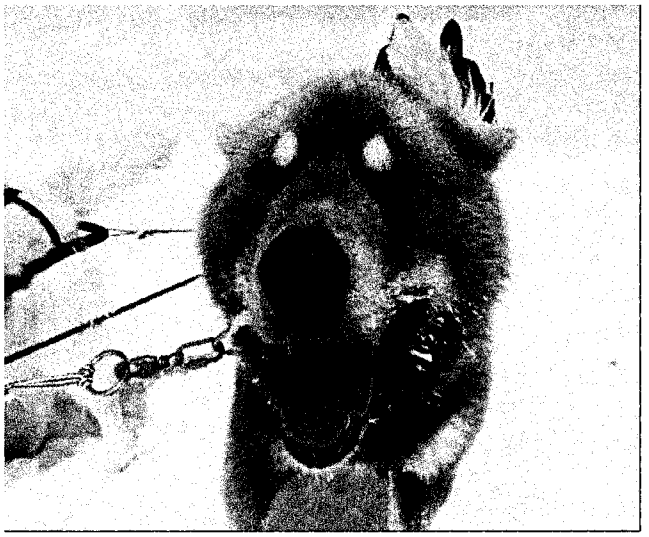

Figure 2: Dogs with unique personalities. This photo was given to me by Beth, and depicts a particular dog she traveled with on an expedition. The dog was a focus of one of her stories.

Spending time and bonding. Because the mushers felt their dogs to be individuals with personalities, "you need to get to know them" was a phrase I heard often when I asked about elements of a good musher-sled dog relationship. As far as getting to know the dogs, many mushers believed this is done through all the time spent with them. Some referred to the *need* to make time with the dogs, while others mentioned the inevitability of spending hours, months, days, and years with the dogs due to the nature of

dog sledding. Several mushers talked about using the summer when the dogs weren't running to spend a different type of quality time with them. For instance, one musher stated: "But in the dog-yard, just dicking around, hanging around, it's where you really can…you get to know your dogs. You gotta spend time. There's no substitute for time."

Bonding was a word I heard often. A few of the bonding stories revolved around "troubled" dogs. When a dog was not working well, the musher would talk about not being able to bond with the dog and the need to do so. Most often, however, bonding was used when referring to raising dogs. From five of the mushers I heard about the bond that grew when they raised their dogs from birth. The mushers often spoke about watching a puppy grow and learn, and eventually excel as a sled dog and athlete:

> I think a lot of it is bonding with them at a young age. I find that raising my own is more beneficial. I get to bond better with them and they just seem more willing to work for me. I think that it's more rewarding and it's not quite so hard to get them to do something I ask them.... I've got many dogs and I find the ones that are more, most honest and loyal, are the ones I've raised.

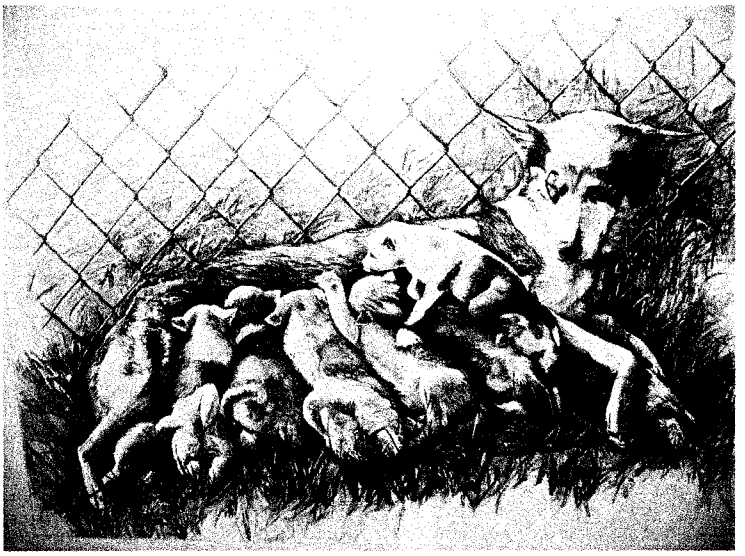

Figure 3: "I find that raising my own is more beneficial." This photo (given to me by Arctic Girl) shows an illustration of some of her dogs that was used in a children's book.

A few mushers stated explicitly that knowing their dogs well was one of the keys to working optimally with them. For example, one musher was talking about how from the outside, it might not look as if a musher with so many dogs could really know them all. He stated:

> Something most people wouldn't understand is how intimate that relationship really is and how well people really do know their dogs. And even those old timers, when you read about the gold days of Nome[6] and some of that stuff, how well people *really did* know their dogs. And I mean, in order to get that performance out of them, they had to.

According to the above musher as well as many other participants in my study, a high level of performance with a dog sled team is, in part, built on an intimate knowledge of the dogs. This knowledge is built through bonding as well as all the time spent with the dogs.

Speaking for dogs. Throughout many of the interviews, the mushers spoke for their dogs. I include this in the "you've got to know your dogs" section because I suspect that the mushers speak for their dogs because they believe they know them so well. Speaking for the dogs included speaking about their likes and dislikes, their moods and feelings, their motivations and their thoughts. At times, some mushers actually quoted what a dog was thinking or feeling while sharing an anecdote or story about a dog.

As far as likes and dislikes I heard general things such as dogs like to fight or dogs love to pull. However, sometimes I heard more specific things about particular dogs. For example, in the following story a musher was talking about a lead dog's preferences and also voicing some of the dog's thoughts:

> When she got older she started to become a curmudgeon about simple things. She'd be like "You've got this young leader here, make them hold the line out. Oh

[6] Nome is a town in Alaska which gained prominence during the gold rush. It is also the finish point in the Iditarod dog sled race (a race of over 1000 miles).

> here's a T-intersection in the trail, make them take the Gee."[7] And as soon as you'd get to something hard, she'd basically kick that dog out of the way and take over. You know, she didn't want the easy stuff.

In a similar fashion, another musher was sharing a story about running on the Yukon River in extremely cold conditions. When referring to one of his sled dogs and her experience in the situation he said; "[She] lost her spunk. Got cold. Got really cold and that's when she was like, 'It's too cold, I'm too small!'", voicing both what the dog might have been feeling and thinking.

Besides voicing the thoughts and feelings of their dogs, I also heard about certain dogs' motivations (although the mushers did not always agree on the dogs' motivations). For instance one musher mentioned that part of the sled dogs' motivation to work was to please the musher. Conversely another musher said, "They don't want to please you. They're not running to make you happy." He felt that instead, his dogs run because of instinct.

I think part of speaking to the motivations of their sled dogs had to do with trying to know them and understand them. One musher who was running some high-strung dogs was having trouble when she first hooked the dogs up, and she explained it like this:

> They would bite their neighbour. Because "it's your fault we're not moving, come on, let's go!" and that was their way of – they thought that that would get them going, was to bite the neighbour.

Similarly, another musher was explaining to me how, on an expedition, a dog was sleeping in the tent due to a frostbite injury. When attempting to understand what the other dogs thought of it, she voiced it like this: "Big baby would get in the tent every night. All the other dogs would look in the morning, 'What the hell is his problem?'"

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[7] Gee is the command often used by mushers to indicate a right-hand turn to the dogs.

Part of knowing the dogs included comparisons about how dogs were or weren't like humans. While it was clear during the interviews that the mushers believed dogs and humans were different, I also heard that dogs are "like people" or similar to people. These statements were usually made while explaining some aspect of their dogs' thoughts, feelings, or motivations. For example, one musher said that dogs were "just like people" when explaining that dogs have moods as well as good and bad days.

Mushers also made analogies to people. For example, one musher liked his lead dogs to be self-motivated and enthusiastic about running all the time, versus slow to get going. He compared it to himself when he struggles to get motivated to exercise. Another similar example is a musher who compared a dog without a job to an unemployed human. "Dogs with jobs are happy dogs… We all think that we don't want to work but would you really want to sit home and do nothing?" Analogies were also used around training. For example, one musher who had friends who were cross-country ski racers had borrowed the idea of interval training from his skier friends and used the technique with his dogs.

Theme two: Respect

The second theme that emerged had to do with respect. The mushers obviously had a lot of respect for their sled dogs and this respect seemed to be a key element of the relationship. They often contrasted the relationship with their sled dogs to one with a pet. The difference, many of the mushers felt, was that they had respect for all the abilities and capabilities of their sled dogs because they worked with them. One musher summed the sentiment up well when she said, "I think an awful lot has to do with respect…We

have utmost respect for what these dogs are capable of." All eight mushers at some point talked about abilities of their sled dogs that they respected. Most often cited were athletic abilities (like power and endurance), the dogs' work ethic and enthusiasm, the toughness of sled dogs, their amazing navigational abilities, and individual dogs' resumes.

Athleticism. "They're just unbelievable athletes and have nothing to lose and know nothing but *do* excel to their potential" was how one musher described it. I often heard stories about how long, far, and fast the sled dogs were able to go whether on expeditions or races. Several times I also heard about the physiology that makes the Alaskan husky in particular such a great athlete. For example, one musher explained to me that:

> I mean the Alaskan husky is the fastest animal on the planet over 30 miles. Nothing (jaguar, wolf, cheetah, anything), nothing can run 30 miles as fast as a well-trained Alaskan husky.

I also heard about sled dogs' abilities to process oxygen as well as about some amazing accomplishments of particular teams of sled dogs (like Lance Mackey's sled dogs, many of whom won the Yukon Quest and less than a month later went on to run and win the Iditarod – the two longest sled dog races in the world).

Work ethic, eagerness, enthusiasm. Many of the mushers told me about how their dogs had an amazing work ethic. Mushers told me how after excruciatingly long runs, the dogs were often enthusiastic to return to work after only a short rest. One musher, when describing a long distance race he participated in with his sled dogs, said:

> I mean, after going eight hundred miles, and you know you may be exhausted, but really they're the ones doing the work. And to see them get up and still be excited to go after that distance, makes me as a person feel pretty stupid to even think I'm tired.

As with this musher throughout all of the interviews mushers shared their respect for the enthusiasm their sled dogs had to work, run, and pull. For example one musher stated that, "you feel the dog's energy come right through to the sled. And that's what, you know, gets me. Just feeling the power of those dogs and explaining to people how much power they have and how much enthusiasm they have."

Figure 4: Enthusiasm. This photo was given to me by Beth.

Toughness. Along with their athleticism, work ethic and enthusiasm, the mushers often espoused the sled dogs' toughness. When I asked one musher what he liked about working with sled dogs, he replied, "Because they're awesome, they don't give a shit. Muddy, wet, cold, hot, whatever, you know?" The same musher went on to tell me a story about a dog who got injured, tearing a chunk out of his shoulder at 65 below while running on the Yukon River. The dog was barely fazed, made no more than a squeak, and continued to run.

Another musher who competes with his dogs in long distance races explained the toughness of his dogs like this:

> Really, I mean to run 1000 or 1200 miles in 10 or 12 days is astounding! And it just, that's what astonishes me about those guys, is their ability to do it. You know, really come out of it unfazed.

In a similar vein, a musher who did a four-month expedition with dogs was speaking of the toughness of her lead dogs when she said:

> And those two never stopped pulling or going forward. And to me that is amazing. Headwinds, where you could barely see the dog team ahead of you. There was no reason for them to do it other than they loved pulling and they loved you.

These short quotations are only some of the examples I heard that showed the mushers' respect for the toughness of their sled dogs, both to travel great distances and endure harsh and extreme conditions.

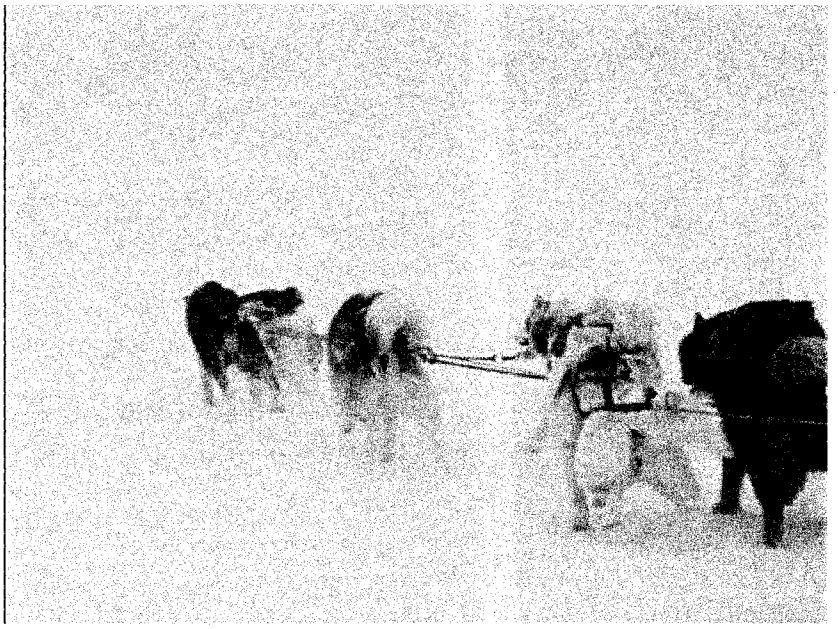

Figure 5: Toughness. A photo given to me by Beth, showing some dogs pulling during a white-out.

Navigational abilities. As far as stories of being out with their dogs, one of the stories that was repeated most often was the story of a lead dog, or lead dogs, finding their way (in total, five of the eight mushers shared navigation stories). Most of the

mushers felt that their dogs had amazing navigational abilities. Conversely, only twice did I hear about dogs losing a trail.

When speaking about the navigational abilities of sled dogs one musher stated: "And their memories are amazing, as far as where a trail goes. Or they remember, if they've been on that trail once, they remember where it was. They know where they are all the time. Their navigation senses are incredible." Likewise, one musher stated:

> A dog, they only have to go over a trail, it's amazing. That's what I always find just so uncanny, that you can take a dog someplace where they haven't been for years, and they'll find the portage at the end of the lake.

One of the funniest navigation stories I was told was about a musher going out with a dog team to find a really old, overgrown trail. At one point he has to cross a clearing and he disagrees with his lead dog about where the trail takes up at the other end. Initially, they head off in the direction he believes the trail to be, but end up having to turn around. The story continues:

> And now I've got to extricate these dogs from all the brush, it's a big pain. Get back into the clearing and I let her go and she ran right to where she thought the trail was, and down the trail we went. And the whole time I was extricating them from the bush she was like, "Bark, bark, bark, bark!" She was scolding me like you wouldn't believe.

Along with the two stories above, I also heard three accounts of dogs navigating in storms or white-outs.

The dog's resume. Some of the mushers dictated to me resumes of various dogs, where they'd been, and what they'd accomplished during their lives. The following two quotations are examples of dog resumes that were given in two different interviews:

> [He] finished multiple races with Mark and then Chris. Won Iditarod, second place like three times, won Beargrease with Chris, I mean his resume's like, you know, ridiculous. Very good.

> I had a great lead dog named 'Roy.' Who…[in] 1988 went up to Northern Greenland, 1990 he went across Antarctica, 1991 he went from Winnipeg to Yellowknife, 1992 he went from Winnipeg to Yellowknife and over to Arviat, 1993 he went to Arviat…I mean he did these major expeditions.

Very obviously in both of the above cases, the mushers have a lot of respect for the accomplishments of their dogs.

Theme three: Two-way communication

Figure 6: Two-way communication. A photo showing Hank working with his dogs.

During all of the interviews I took some time to talk with the mushers about how they communicate with their dogs. Some mushers had more to say than others about communication, but all of them contributed ideas about how they were able to, at a minimum, convey messages to their dogs. I have broken this section on communication into two portions: first, the musher's part in understanding and communicating with dogs, and second, the dog's part in understanding and communicating to mushers. There is a

small section at the end about the technique of having trained and knowledgeable dogs communicate with dogs who were in a training or learning role.

The musher's role in communicating. One idea I heard quite often was that it was the musher's or human's *responsibility* to understand and communicate with dogs. Six of the eight mushers said that it was the musher who must adapt to the dogs to both understand and read dog "language" as well as communicate in a way their dogs would understand. For example, one said:

> It's our responsibility to understand them and respond to them...In their terms. That they understand. We're not expecting them to understand where we're coming from. We have to understand where the dogs are coming from.

For the most part, understanding dogs had to do with reading a dog's body language. Mushers told me that they could understand things about the dogs by looking at their ears, stance, gait, eyes, tails, and head position:

> You have to pay attention to their tails, their ears, how they're running,...how they're reacting to the other dogs around them. Do they eat their food? Do they sit in their usual position? There's so many ways that they tell you things.

In the same way, another musher said that:

> Dogs are masters of body language. I mean that's how they communicate. In order to be a good trainer I think that's a huge part of what we need to do is understand that body language that they give off. Because on a race like Iditarod, when we're running down the trail, they can't say, you know, "I don't feel good," or "something isn't right." But standing on a sled you can look down the line and you can see if someone has any issues just by the way they're holding their ears or the way they're holding their head or the way, you know, their gait.

These two quotations are just two of the many that described how mushers read the body language of their dogs.

According to the mushers, communicating to the dogs is done through a variety of methods. The mushers all use verbal voice commands such as "gee" to tell the leaders to

turn right, or "haw" to indicate a left. However, many of the mushers explained that communication with dogs isn't so much about the actual words that are used, as it is the "cues" the dogs are picking up on. For example, one musher shared a story about a guy who was training his dogs the "Ready, let's go!" command, which is a command often used to start the team. Before he would say the command he would clear his voice like, "Hemhemm," and before long, the dogs used the cue of him clearing his voice as a start command. Like in this story, some of the participants emphasized that it was important for the musher to understand what cues they were using as dogs are so aware of cues, and sometimes pick up on unintentional ones.

Another example of this is one musher who, while training in an assistant musher (or handler), realized that the dogs were not able to understand some of the handler's commands. After taking some time to think about it, she realized that as well as the actual voice commands, the dogs were picking up on cues she gave them that she had not even realized she was giving. She explained, "So I was like, 'Okay, what do I do that he's not doing?' And there's probably a cue that the dog's actually going off of, but I don't even realize it." She eventually figured out the cue, which was a little "yip, yip" sound that reinforced when a dog was thinking the right thing, and she was able to share this with her handler.

Along with cues and voice commands, other aspects of human to dog communication that were discussed by various individual mushers included using different tones of voice, using actual noises, and always beginning a voice command by using a particular dog's name. Besides giving dogs instruction, mushers also talked about

picking up on the moods of a certain dog or the morale of a team, and communicating encouragement or reassurance when they needed it.

The dog's role in communication. Most often, the mushers felt that dogs were able to understand humans either by picking up on musher's cues or by reading human body language. For example, one particular musher said,

> They can read your mind, and it's not that they can read your mind. But, we're very guarded as humans – talking – you know we think of things to say before we say it. However, you personify what you're thinking and feeling through your body language. And that's their life, and they read you and they watch you every second of their life, all the time.

The other thing I heard about in regards to communication was the dogs' ability to sense things about humans. This "sense" was described by four of the mushers, although it was not really qualified beyond being called a sense. For example, one musher stated, "If I'm having a bad day, they sense that on me, whatever the situation may be." Along the same lines, another musher said, "but they know, I mean if you get down standing on the back of the sled, they know it. And you can feel it in their pace." Yet another musher stated, "You think running up there they'd not be aware of what you're doing back there, but oh they are, very much so." This musher went on to share a story of being on a race as a teen and being hungry and cold and tired. She explained how the dogs picked up on her mood and their pace got slower and slower until at the last road crossing someone told her it was all downhill from there. After that, she explained that the dogs, "perked up and they started loping a lot, and they cruised on much faster than we had gone for a long time. And it was all because I was upbeat. And my voice was upbeat. But they can sense that."

The area of communication that was talked about least often was how dogs intentionally communicate with humans, although several mushers did indicate that their dogs did so. For example, one musher said, "You just have to pull your head out and look. And they will tell you exactly what's going on. 'I'm scared. Give me some water. Can we stop? Can I lay down in a water puddle?' Whatever, you know?"

Dogs teaching dogs. One final aspect of communication I heard about from six of the mushers was the technique of having dogs teach other dogs. A common example was the technique of using an older experienced lead dog to train in a new lead dog, as that dog could communicate much better to the trainee than the musher. One musher explained:

> We'll put a younger inexperienced dog with that experienced leader. And to me it always impresses me how quickly that is conveyed between the dogs. You know there's much better communication between two dogs, of course, than us.

However, discussion of this practice (having dogs teach dogs) was almost always followed by the caveat that eventually the newer leader needed to take their cues from the human. The mushers felt the lead dog eventually needed to stand on his or her own four feet, and make decisions versus relying on another dog:

> I do a lot of little things where they have to stand on their own four feet, they don't get neck-lined to a knowledgeable leader. I only give them crutch leader, in other words, I'll put a knowledgeable leader with an unknowledgeable leader a limited number of times.

To summarize, according to the mushers, musher-sled dog communication is a two-way process. However, many mushers stated that the responsibility to understand and communicate effectively is, for the most part, the human's. In large part, communicating with sled dogs involves understanding and giving cues and reading body language.

Theme four: A relationship built on trust

Figure 7: Trust. A photo showing Beth in the tent with one of her lead dogs.

After listening to the interviews and reading through the transcripts several times, one theme that materialized was the idea that the musher-sled dog relationship is one built on trust. Only one musher did not mention the idea of trust (which does not necessarily mean he has no trust with his dogs). More often, the mushers spoke about the importance of the dogs trusting them, however, several mushers also talked about times where they have trusted or relied on their dogs too. In this section I use many direct quotations and stories as I felt when it came to the theme of trust, the words and stories of the mushers spoke most clearly.

Dogs' trust in the musher. According to seven of the eight mushers interviewed, in a good relationship, dogs trust the musher. If the dogs trust the musher they are more confident, they run/work better, and they are willing to do more challenging and difficult things. In the following quotation, one musher explained how from a very early age, he works with his puppies to build trust by going on little adventures:

> And we'll go out in deep grass or brush and the puppies will get kind of hung up in grass and they'll cry, you know. But with our voices we'll encourage them, and

> they'll come out, you know, and it's all good. And maybe later you'll be in deep snow and have the same type of situation but we'll always encourage them. And they learn that, you know when they get that encouragement, we'll never ask them to do something that they can't actually do...We build on that and build on that and eventually we're asking them to do big things like run the Iditarod or...things like that. I feel that as long as that trust bond is never broken...you can do a lot.

This idea of trust being about asking difficult things from dogs, but never *too* much was something I heard from several mushers. As in the above example with the puppies, another musher shares a similar viewpoint:

> If you're going to perform at a high level you have to have a margin of trust with your dogs and your dog team. So having that trust, is everything. And a lot of people they don't understand it so they run their dogs too far or too fast or too hard or whatever. So they'll never be able to get a higher level of, because they don't have that.

Another way that the mushers emphasized the importance of trust was by sharing stories about what can happen when the trust bond is not there, or is broken. For example, one musher was telling me that any time he's near open water, two of his lead dogs will go way off the trail to avoid it. He stated:

> They won't go near the water. They just don't want to have anything to do with it. And I know [why], they went in one time. They broke through...they remember. And so, they communicate like that, you know. And you kind of, you've got to try and get their confidence that you're not going to make them do something that's going to hurt them.

Another musher talks about a troubled dog he inherited who had little confidence. He explains how he actually took the dog to an agility course in order to build confidence and trust in the dog. He explains:

> That was a dog that we inherited, he had failed in three kennels and he, he was just petrified of everything. He was just totally scared of the world...He learned that I am going to push him, and I am going to expect things from him. And that they could be hard, they could seem scary to him, but they aren't going to hurt him and they aren't going to kill him.

As in some of the examples above, building and maintaining trust in their dogs was seen by the mushers as key to having an effective working relationship with them.

Mushers sometimes put trust in their dogs. Although this idea was less persistent, when mushers did talk about trusting or relying on their dogs, the stories were quite memorable. As with many of the dog stories in these interviews, they most often revolved around lead dogs. One musher put it like this, "good lead dogs always stand out, you know, because you're depending on them so much."

Two examples that show mushers trust and rely on their lead dogs are: a story about one musher's experience during a storm in a wilderness area, and another musher's experience concerning lead dogs negotiating traffic. In the first experience a musher explains how late in the day in an unfamiliar wilderness area, there was a snow squall and limited visibility. The story continues:

> The trail was obliterated and I was getting really stressed out. And my lead dog – it was like we sat there for a while and I was contemplating on what to do. Should I make a camp or, you know? And she just all of a sudden stuffed her nose – we had gotten about 6 inches of snow, fresh powder. She put her nose down, snuffled around – left to right, left to right, found the trail and just took us back to the truck…It was a white-out. Wow that just totally taught me that you need to really trust them. They trust you. But in situations like that, they definitely will do it.

Another musher explains how she relies on her lead dogs to make decisions in some dangerous situations:

> With this big string we're running right now [22 dogs] they're up and around the next corner before I know it's there. And the other day I was going onto the loop to the south and I saw a slight hesitation in the front of the team. By the time I got there eight dogs were already passing this truck and trailer. So they have to make a lot of judgment calls and decisions when you're not there to guide them in a big team. But they did just perfect.

As in the example that follows, a few stories about trust also revolved around times when the musher had mistakenly *not* trusted a dog:

> And we went around about two thirds of this lake and we were going around into a little cove. And I was giving him a "gee" command. And I gave it to him time after time and he *knows* this command. And I couldn't set a hook[8] because we were in fresh powder. And it just seemed to get worse and worse and worse. Finally I got a hook to set. And I went up there and was going to pull him the direction I wanted to go. And I got up there and I could see what he could see. And there was open water right in this cove. There's an inlet. And I understood exactly where he was coming from. I could see by the look in his eyes that he knew he was doing something wrong. But yet he stood there and refused to take my command. And my feelings on that dog changed a lot that day. So there is certainly a trust that goes both ways.

Quite simply, this section demonstrates that the mushers felt the trust bond to be a key element of the human-sled dog relationship.

Theme five: Partnership

Figure 8: "I guess my thing has just been traveling the land with my dog team." Photo of a painting done by Karl.

[8] A snow hook is a hook shaped device attached to the sled with a line. It can be set into the snow to anchor the sled, however, it doesn't work as well in fresh powder or on sheer ice.

Partnership is what I decided to call the fifth theme that surfaced in the musher interviews. The mushers often talked about how the working relationship in dog sledding was one that was shared between the dogs and the musher. In this section I will begin by discussing how the mushers felt their dogs were thinking and feeling beings, able to contribute to a relationship or partnership. I will go on to share some of the phrases and ideas the mushers used that demonstrate the idea of partnership or a *shared* working relationship. Finally, I will discuss what different mushers felt the roles of both the humans and the dogs in this partnership are.

Dogs are thinking and feeling beings. I do not believe it's a stretch to say that all of the mushers interviewed felt their dogs were sentient to some degree. Even the mushers who did not specifically talk about their dogs having thoughts and feelings still mentioned things like the dogs look at the lay of the land when navigating, make decisions, learn things as well as get excited, ashamed, or down. In other words, it was implied that the dogs were afforded at least some ability to think and feel.

Some mushers described outright how their dogs were able to think and feel. One musher felt that huskies, especially the "older style"[9] huskies, were quite independent and intelligent. She reasoned that this is because, "You want a smart dog if you're running a trapline or if you're running over questionable ice." Another musher said, "[T]hey really are a smart animal. And they have feelings and they care about you," showing a definite belief that her dogs think and feel.

[9] An older style husky would be one that comes from an older genetic line. These would be dogs similar to those historically used by the Inuit, trappers, Hudson Bay workers, and during the gold rush, etc. Characteristics mushers often denote to older style huskies include thicker coats, generally larger builds, and physical and mental toughness.

In contrast, some mushers referred to particular dogs who weren't so smart. For example, one dog was described as stupid, another as having only two brain cells. But when the mushers did talk about dogs thinking, it was usually (once again) when they were describing their lead dogs. One musher was telling me about two less experienced lead dogs who were starting to lead without a more experienced dog with them to help:

> When we do that, put two less experienced dogs up front, you can suddenly see that they're forced to really think about what they're doing. And usually when we do that the pace decreases because they're spending more time thinking than driving and pushing.

Similarly, I heard about dogs gaining experience over time, or dogs learning and becoming more proficient. For example, one musher when comparing his young leaders to an experienced dog said, "an older dog will get light on its feet and this and that, that it's seen open water before and run on the river and that kind of thing." The partnership mushers in my study talked about, then, was a partnership between two thinking, feeling beings.

Mushers and dogs share a partnership. Throughout the interviews, mushers made statements such as the human is part of the team, part of the pack or in a relationship similar to that of human work colleagues. One musher even went so far as to state, "I mean I've just been with dogs for so long, it's hard to really separate myself from the dogs." However, more often the partnership was discussed in terms of each party (human and dog) working together with distinct roles.

In describing the partnership, one woman who has spent years taking students on dog sledding expeditions said,

> You realize you aren't doing it alone, and that you're tied to this animal that pulls your stuff along, pulls you along, provides great joy. And in exchange you are feeding them, you are taking care of them, you're cleaning up their poop.

The partnership was also described by one musher as a mutual exchange:

> It's a mutual exchange. The human holds some of the cards, more of the cards than the dog does, but it's a mutual exchange. You're doing it for love and they're doing it for love, also. And so you're working together.

Another musher stated it like this: "it's you and eight or ten or twelve other beings that are all in the same experience."

In some cases, I asked the musher how the relationship with a working dog was different than that of a pet, at other times the mushers brought this topic up themselves. I heard often that the relationship mushers had with their working dogs was deeper or more involved than the one they had with their pet. Sometimes it was compared to the relationship one might have with work colleagues. Two mushers felt strongly enough about their relationship with certain sled dogs that they went so far as to say they would do "anything" for them. One musher said, "Like I have a pet and I like my pet and she's a great dog. But I would do anything for Balder or Solo who were the lead dogs on that Arctic trip that I did, because they were the ones who pulled me across." Likewise, another musher stated, "I mean some of these dogs, I mean I love these dogs. I mean I would stand in front of a bulldozer for them."

Figure 9: Companionship. Photo showing Beth on Hudson Bay with a sled dog.

Closely linked to partnership was the idea of companionship. Five of the mushers talked about being out on the land and having the dogs as companions with them. Stated simply, one musher said, "I guess my thing has just been traveling the land with my dog team and enjoying having the dogs. And you can see how much they enjoy it." Along the same lines one musher said his motivation for running dogs was, in part, being out on the land with them, "out in the middle of nowhere, just you and the dogs." In a similar fashion, one participant shared his first experience mushing. He had a job as a dog trainer and had been left alone to figure it all out, and work with the dogs hauling wood. At first with all the hard work and chaos of the dogs, he got angry and frustrated at being left alone. But then he said, "About day ten, I suddenly realized I wasn't alone. And it was like an epiphany of where I was. I wasn't alone; I had all these dogs there."

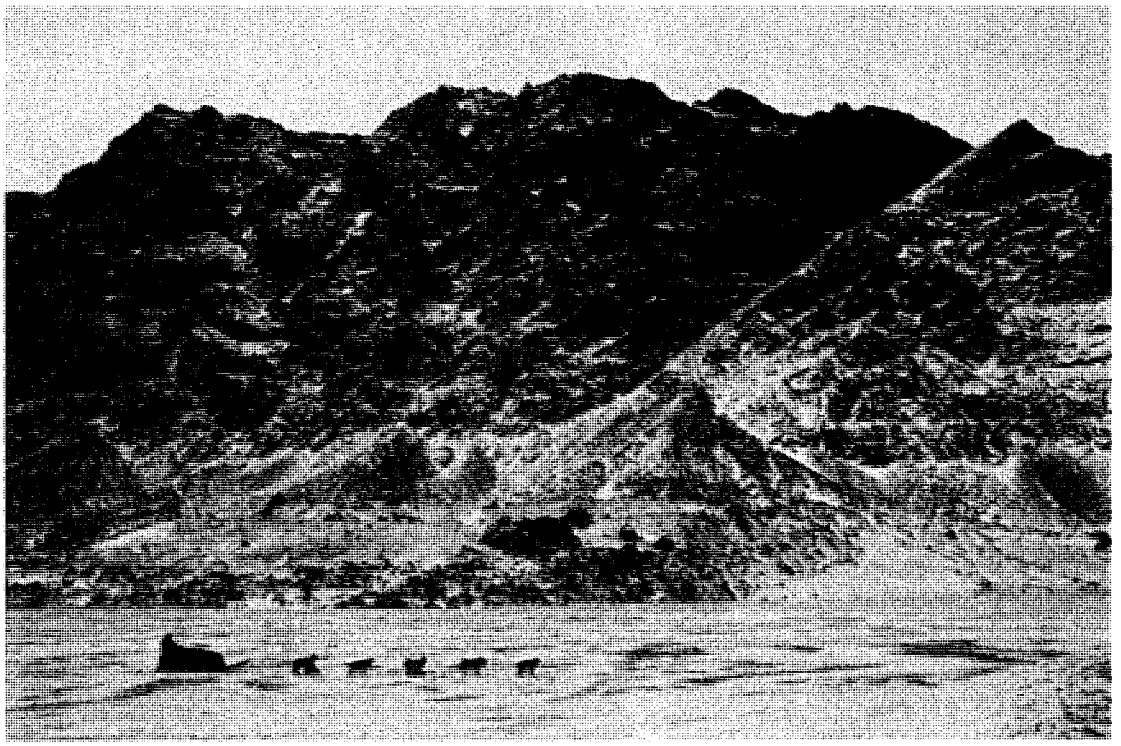

Figure 10: "I wasn't alone; I had all these dogs there." Photo showing Hank and his dog team on an expedition.

The musher's role. Although I heard about a partnership, companionship or mutual working relationship, I also heard from many mushers that the humans in the relationship had a distinct role, and with it, responsibilities. Several mushers stressed that part of the human's role was to be the dominant force or "alpha" in the relationship. For example, one participant stated, "Now we're supposed to be the smarter of the two. And we're supposed to be in charge. I mean it's our responsibility to understand them and respond to them." As part of being in charge one musher explained, "you need to be, you know, the alpha. So you need to not 'lose it,' carry yourself with composure."

I also heard during many interviews (and know from experience) that having sled dogs means shouldering a lot of responsibility and doing a lot of work. In the words of one musher:

> The commitment you have, it's not about the one walk a week or throwing them some kibble every day, it's not that. You need to be there for them, you need to pay attention to them, love them, care for them, work them when it's time. It takes hours every day. Every day of the week. All year long, 24-7. It's a commitment.

Similarly, one musher shared his experience with handlers:

> I have a lot of people who want to be dog mushers and they come to me and they want to be a handler or whatever and they'll show up. But hardly any of them, a very small percentage of them, are really ready for what the work is, how much work it is. It just blows them away.

Along with the work of having sled dogs, I heard often about breeding. Many of the mushers suggested that part of their role was to breed dogs and to do so responsibly. For example, one musher believed that there were some irresponsible breeders out there. He said, "I mean I'm a big one on responsible breeding. I really don't like people to…I call it your back-yard dog breeding." Discussions about breeding usually revolved

around responsible breeding, getting the best athletes, or breeding for the next great lead dog.

There were also many other opinions about what the musher's responsibility was in the working partnership. When I asked the mushers about training techniques, I heard a variety of things. For example, a couple of the mushers felt that if something is not going right in the training, it always comes back to the musher. In regards to people who blame the dogs, one musher said, "They don't look in the mirror and realize they're not doing things right, they're not training them right, they're not conditioning them right, not relating to them right, you know?" Another musher felt his dogs were driven by instinct, and the musher's role was to channel the dog's energy and instincts. For example, he said, "they're so instinctually driven to run 'til they can't. So it's best, obviously, to know your dogs and take that from the baseline and work it all the way through, especially in a longer race. Because they'll dictate how things are going. You've got to work with them." These two quotations only scratch the surface of what mushers' felt their responsibilities were in regards to training the dogs. Other ideas that were raised included the importance of consistency in training, the idea that the musher needs to have a lot of facial and voice affect, the importance of exposing dogs to as many experiences as possible so they become comfortable and able to adapt to many situations, and the importance of having and communicating clear expectations, to name a few.

The dog's role. While the role of the dogs in the partnership was not always explicitly outlined, implicitly, it was clear that many of the mushers expected the dogs to work. For example, they would tell me that sled dogs are instinctually driven to run or pull, that they are naturals at pulling from birth or that they love to pull. The expectation

that their dogs would work was even clearer when they described a dog that did not pull well. For example, one musher said, "for the first year and a half, they wouldn't have made any of our teams. In fact, we would go out and they would not pull a lick for the entire run." Statements like this were the most common way mushers expressed the expectations they had of their dogs around work.

However, there were two mushers who stated what they expected of their dogs more explicitly:

> Whereas with me and my driving dogs these are like colleagues. And if you don't work hard, you make me mad. And I tend to not like you as much if you don't work hard, you know? Because I'm counting on you. That's our relationship.

Along the same lines, another musher was talking about what he expected from his dogs when he said:

> You always want to make sure they understand that you're in charge, you're in control and you will not expect them to do anything they can't do, but you're going to expect them to do more than they think they can do.

To conclude this section, mushers in my study group believe they have a partnership with their sled dogs. Most of them believe this is a partnership between two thinking, feeling beings that involves work and expectations on the part of both parties.

Theme six: Learning

I was interested to hear about what the mushers learned from working with sled dogs. Two ideas came up frequently, but generally, I got such a variety of answers that it seemed what the mushers learned was quite individual. For some, it was a difficult question to answer, while for others, they had something to share immediately. I found that, at least initially, I got many vague statements. Some examples include:

> I've learned everything from them...they teach me things, it's hard to be too specific.
>
> It's just phenomenal what I've learned. I mean I'm a completely different person because of training sled dogs my whole life.
>
> It [working with animals] makes people better people. No two ways about it.

Thankfully, some of the "learnings" were more specific.

In the following section I'll discuss the two most common ideas: that mushers learn about the amazing capabilities of dogs; and, learning to work well with sled dogs transfers to working well with people. I will also briefly discuss one idea or "learning" that several mushers felt it was important for non-mushers to understand. At the end of this section, I have also included a list of some of the diverse things mushers felt they have learned through working with dogs.

The amazing capabilities of dogs. Four of the mushers felt that because they work with dogs, they appreciate the amazing capabilities of dogs. Basically, they believe the dogs are worthy of more consideration than they may generally get in Western society. One musher put it like this, "They're amazing. And people don't, they never give them enough credit. People will always look at dogs and think, 'Aw, it's just a dog.'" Another musher shared a similar idea of how she's learned about dogs' amazing capabilities through working with them. She said:

> We have utmost respect for what these dogs are capable of, and their knowledge, and, you know, we trust them. When you're *working* with your animal you really treat them like that, with a lot of respect that way. And I think a lot of people lose that with their pets. They don't realize the talents and capabilities that the dogs have.

She went on to say that average pet owners can also gain respect for a dog's intelligence and capabilities by pursuing activities with them such as agility training. Likewise, another musher, when talking about the key thing his clients learn on the dog tours stated:

> So that's the dog-related aspect that they learn. What...[the dogs are] actually capable of. And it's amazing what they actually do, even though you do this for a long time. It's like, "Geez, can these dog really do all this?" And then they do it with ease.

For this musher, and the mushers above, understanding the capabilities dogs have and not discounting them, is an important lesson.

Learning interspecies caring. The other idea I heard quite often (from at least four of the mushers interviewed) when I asked what mushers learned was that by working with sled dogs, they had learned to work with people better. I heard about how skills used to work with dogs were transferred to working with kids as a parent, students as a teacher, coworkers, and fellow humans generally. I was told that they work with people better having worked with dogs because they had developed empathy, had learned compassion, were able to endure chaos and stay calm, and had learned patience. The quotations that follow are just a few that represent this idea.

One musher felt she worked with her coworkers better having worked with the dogs. She shared that "at the...Vet clinic things can be complete mayhem there, but you know I've learned not to let it bother me. You just keep doing what you do." She went on to say:

> There's so many lessons you could just carry over to people and relating with people. If you meet someone who's really crabby or grumpy or whatever, I'll think, "Oh, you must be having a bad day." It must be something going on in their life that's making them like that.

Similarly, another musher was talking about how working with dogs made him a better parent. He said, "It's neat because learning how to have expectations and seeing them through in dog behaviour is transferred to kids." Later, he went on to say, "[My wife and I] joke that people should have to train a dog before having children." Along the same lines, a teacher shares how she teaches better, having learned interactive techniques to train dogs:

> We see as teachers imparting knowledge, and it's a one-way track. And training and learning is not a one-way track, it's a two-way track. And by working with animals I've learned to pay more attention to my students, and by paying more attention to them, and using those techniques, they invariably learn faster, they enjoy the process of learning. They're engaged because I'm engaged with them and there's an interface, versus I'm not just being [in] a pulpit and broadcasting things to them. And so, that's probably been the greatest thing I've learned in terms of educating and by working with animals, I think I work with people better.

Likewise, she felt students she's taken on dog sled trips also learn to work with people better, having worked with the dogs. She said that:

> I think it's easier sometimes for students to show compassion to the dogs versus other students. But if they're being compassionate to animals, and caring for animals, it usually overlaps and they extend that to their brigade-mates [fellow students].

A lesson for non-mushers. While never discussed during the more formal portion of the interviews, several mushers indicated to me that it was important for non-mushers to learn/understand how much mushers really care for and about their sled dogs. There are individuals and groups that at times have proposed the practice of mushing is unethical or cruel. For this reason, several of the mushers wanted it understood how important their dogs are to them, how well they care for them, and that the dogs actually enjoy being sled dogs.

Other. The following is a list of direct quotations showing the variety of other things the mushers (or their clients or students) had learned through their experiences working with sled dogs, or the experience of mushing:

> There's so much to learn about compassion and patience.
>
> You learn to be very optimistic.
>
> They [clients on dog tours] learn a lot of nature stuff too.
>
> It makes people...get outside of themselves and outside of their own process and realize that they're very interdependent.
>
> Just take things a little slower and really think about things before doing them.
>
> With some [participants] you definitely see kids gaining some confidence doing something they've never done before.
>
> One other thing you learn the most from your dogs is how much they pick up and you don't...as you're going along, that they smell and notice.
>
> It's good to have kids around animals because it obviously teaches them responsibility.
>
> It shows you your roots a little bit. Very primal. As a human, animal.

To conclude the findings section, I found through my interviews with eight mushers, that each musher was unique in their motivations for working with sled dogs as well as in their beliefs about human-sled dog relationships. However, six main themes or general ideas did emerge from the interviews about musher-sled dog relations. They included getting to know the dogs, respect for their abilities, two-way communication, trust, partnership, and learning. In the section that follows, I will discuss how these findings fit into the broader context of human-animal relations research as well as the lessons that can be gleaned for humane and environmental education.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In the following chapter I return to and discuss each of the themes that emerged from the interviews, making connections to human-animal relations research as well as environmental and humane education. I will also discuss how the themes address the original purpose of this research. While in some ways the findings stand on their own, they do have some applicability to broader contexts that are worth elucidating.

"You've got to get to know your dogs"

My original purpose statement suggested I would attempt to discover the elements and the quality of the relationship between mushers and sled dogs. The first theme that emerged from the interviews was the idea that dogs are individual characters with personalities and part of working well with sled dogs entails getting to know them. In light of this theme, then, there isn't actually a universal musher-sled dog relationship to discover. Although themes or common ideas did emerge about musher-sled dog relations, the mushers felt that because each dog is an individual there are many varied relationships that occur. I also discovered that each musher had their own motivations and ideas regarding these relationships, further complicating my ability to describe and generalize about relationship elements and quality.

I think this finding, that both dogs and mushers are individuals, suggests that there are as many possible relationships within the musher-sled dog contingent as there are individuals. This idea can offer insights into future research pertaining to dogs and humans. Like Miklosi et al. (2004), my findings support the proposition that since dogs are social animals, research about dogs needs to take into account the effects of group

members within their social group (humans or other dogs). My research suggests that humans and dogs interact and can have relationships of substance that are varied and sometimes complex. Studies that don't take into account the individual personalities or the social nature of dogs will probably lack scope and depth.

Historically, animals have often been regarded as mechanistic objects in research (Evernden, 1985; Noske, 1997). The findings in my research do not support studying other animals as objects. For the mushers in my study, it was clear that their dogs were more than objects; in fact, they were interacting sentient beings. Evernden (1985) suggests that direct experience with an animal can often come into conflict with the dominant Western viewpoint that animals are merely objects. Instead, direct experience of animals can lead humans to understand that they are living, interacting subjects. He suggests that our experiences and feelings about other animals are just as real and relevant as scientific research that often views animal others as objects. He writes, "How can we permit this reversal of the primary and the secondary, our own direct experience of the world and an abstraction about it which for most of us really amounts to second-hand information? Why is the gossip of experts more real than immediate experience?" (p. 78). He proposes that our experiences, thoughts, and feelings that lead us to believe animals are subjects, should be considered just as *real* and significant as the facts and findings of scientific experts.

However, there is more and more research supporting the idea of animals as subjects. One example is research conducted by Sanders (1999) about the relationships between humans and companion dogs, guide dog owners and guide dogs, guide dog trainers and guide dogs as well as veterinarians and dogs. This research led him to state:

"Those who live and work with canine companions regard them as individuals who display the unique habits, traits, and perspectives that compose personality" (p. 138). As an educator, I believe this idea that animals are subjects with personality points to the importance of creating opportunities within formal and informal education where animals are portrayed as subjects rather than merely objects.

The finding regarding the importance of "getting to know" the dogs supports some of the other literature I reviewed as well. Just as some of the mushers suggested spending time getting to know their dogs and bonding with them was important for a good relationship, other researchers have found that direct contact with animals leads to more realistic understanding about animals as well as more positive feelings about animals. As discussed in the literature review, Ross et al. (2003) suggested children who have more direct contact with nature develop more ecocentric (and less anthropocentric) ideas about other life. Fawcett (2002), in her study, found that the children who had brief direct contact with animals had more positive feelings about three wild animals (frogs, raccoons, and bats) as well as more stories of friendship and kinship.

As an environmental educator, I attach importance to this finding. Educators wishing to improve relations between animals and humans, where children come to have more realistic and positive ideas about animals and human connections with them, should try to conceive ethical ways for children to have more contact with animals and nature. Selby (1995) suggests, in his guide for humane education, the importance of breaching the divide that separates the outside world and the traditional classroom. He discusses the importance of finding ways to let the outside world in as well as "letting the inside world

out" (p.46) so that students can have personal contact and involvement with the natural or more-than-human world.

Finally, as an environmental educator and human-animal relations researcher, I would not be surprised if positive and direct experience with one specific animal translates to more realistic and positive ideas about other individual animals and species. For example, if an individual has a positive experience with one animal (such as a sled dog or a pet dog) and gains an understanding about who that animal is, I would suggest that they may be more likely to transfer those ideas and feelings over to other animals and species. While some research has been done on this subject (e.g., Fidler, Light and Costall, 1996) this might very well be an important topic to consider in future human-animal relations research.

In summation, the interviews with mushers revealed the importance of getting to know the dogs with whom they worked. This finding suggests that research about dogs should acknowledge that dogs are individuals with personalities as well as the fact that they are affected by social others. This finding also points to the importance of interacting, or having direct contact with animals, to develop clear understandings about our relations with them as humans. As discussed in the next section, direct daily contact with animals (at least in the case of mushers and sled dogs) can lead to humans developing respect for animal others.

Respect

One thing that every musher in my study group shared was respect for their sled dogs' abilities. The mushers I interviewed all had at least ten years of contact and

interaction while raising, caring for, training, and working with lots of sled dogs. Historically, when humans lived a hunter-gatherer lifestyle or when the majority of humans lived rural lifestyles, there was more daily interaction with animals, both wild and domesticated. In Western society today, for most people, there is less daily contact with other animals and the natural environment than in the past (Weston, 1991). In my literature review, I discussed the concerns some authors have about how decreased daily contact with animals may have detrimental effects on humans. For example, Baenninger (1995) believes that during human evolution, interaction with domestic animals changed the way "in which human beings think about and perceive the world" (p. 75). He has concerns about what will disappear along with our daily contact with animals.

I propose that one solution to the decreased daily contact with animal others in modern Western society is to learn from those who *do* have daily contact with animals. The mushers in my study have years of experience and daily contact working and interacting intensely with dogs. So what do humans who spend hours, days, months, and years with sled dogs have to tell us? The most prevalent theme throughout the interviews was respect. Every single musher talked about the respect they had for their sled dogs' abilities, whether it was their athleticism, toughness, work ethic, eagerness, enthusiasm, navigational abilities, or accomplishments. Through working with them, the mushers had a lot of appreciation and *respect* for sled dogs and what they can do.

Budiansky (1992), in his book about animal evolution and domestication, writes about how equating human use of animals with cruelty or abusiveness is a simplification of human relationships with domesticated animals. He suggests that:

> To people who work closely with animals, there has never been any contradiction between respecting them, grasping the essential truth that they are living beings

> with a will of their own, and at the same time using them judiciously for human purposes. (p. 155)

This idea resonates with my findings that while the mushers in my study were using their sled dogs for different purposes (e.g., racing, tour companies, trapping) they still had a great amount of respect for them. They also believed that the activity of mushing was not just beneficial for the humans involved, but that the dogs also gained something. (I will discuss this idea further in the section on partnership.)

Weil (2004) wrote a book about humane education which, in part, involves giving students tools to create a "better, safer, more peaceful, and less cruel world" (p. 5). In her book she shares her idea about what the elements of humane education entail. Interestingly, she suggests the third element in humane education involves instilling in students reverence, respect, and responsibility for all life. According to Weil (2004), feelings of respect are demonstrated through words and action. Very obviously, words of respect were common amongst the mushers I interviewed.

It's difficult to respect someone you do not know. But it seems that in the case of mushers, contact with animals can engender respect, as well as a better understanding of who dogs are. I think the mushers' knowledge about, and respect for their sled dogs, besides embodying an element of humane education, also supports the findings in Fidler, Light, and Costall's (1996) study that found people who have experienced growing up with a cat or dog were more likely to describe dog actions in terms of desires, feelings, and understanding. Experience with animals certainly influenced how dogs' actions in this study were understood.

Even though daily contact with animals may not be the norm in Western society, humans are still intimately connected with animals in many ways (i.e., food-meat,

medical research, animals pollinate some of the plants we eat, etc.). I don't think we should *avoid* "knowledge" about seemingly unpleasant animal use (as was the case for many of the participants in the Knight et al. (2003) study which explored human attitudes about animal use). I don't believe avoidance of information pertaining to unpleasant animal use is a solution to solving some of today's global issues (oppression, ecological degradation, animal extinction, global warming). Instead, I agree with Weil (2004) who suggests in her guide to humane education that we are better off knowing about, and understanding, all the interconnections between humans and other life on the planet so we can learn how to live with compassion and *respect* for all life. My discussions with the mushers illustrated that this respect came from the depth and messiness of their lived experience with sled dogs.

Two-Way Communication

According to the mushers interviewed in this study, they engage in interspecies communication with their sled dogs. This contrasts with the idea held by many researchers in the past who argued that animals aren't social beings because they do not use human language (Noske, 1997; Sanders, 1993). The mushers did use some words their dogs understood such as the "gee" and "haw" voice commands to indicate right or left turns. The dogs, then, did understand a few human words. But the mushers felt, more importantly, that the dogs understood them by picking up on the cues they gave out as well as their body language.

However, this communication between musher and dog was not just about the communication of instructions while mushing. By using cues and reading body language

mushers talked about the communication of thoughts and/or emotions on the part of both musher and dog. More than being just surface exchanges, these interchanges seemed to have substance to them. Four mushers in particular discussed how, for instance, the dogs were able to sense things about their mood and emotions. Because there was some communication of thoughts, feelings, and emotion between mushers and sled dogs, this added depth to their shared experience or reality. This idea of shared experience can be evidenced in statements I heard such as the musher is "part of the team," "part of the pack," and "in the same experience," with the dogs.

To conclude, the mushers in my study believe that their sled dogs definitely have an ability to understand humans. This corresponds well with the research done by Hare et al. (2002) and Miklosi et al., (2004) who suggest that dogs, through domestication over time, have developed abilities that make the species especially adept at understanding as well as communicating with humans. Like Sanders' (2003) research into the social relations of humans and dogs, I found that the mushers in my study believed the communication with sled dogs involves the conveyance of thought and emotion between two species.

A Relationship Built on Trust

In my original purpose statement, I proposed my intent to discover elements and quality of relationships between mushers and sled dogs. The theme of trust that emerged from the interviews, while definitely an element, also speaks to the *quality* of the relationship mushers have with their sled dogs. Throughout the interviews I heard mushers talk about building trust with their dogs as well as relying on their dogs,

especially their lead dogs. When mushers discussed the difference between relationships they had with a pet, one common idea that came up was that because they had to rely on their dogs while mushing, they felt their relationship was deeper or stronger than one with a pet. For example, some of the stories told by the mushers showed how, at times, the mushers placed their personal safety in the hands (or paws) of their dogs (i.e., stories of lead dogs negotiating traffic, navigating in storms or white-outs, and negotiating open water or thin ice).

I have not found any academic literature written on the importance of trust in interspecies relationships such as seen here between humans and sled dogs. The only exception was a small reference to trust in a book chapter discussing relationships between guide dog owners and guide dogs based on research done by Sanders (1999). For one participant in Sanders' (1999) study, trust was an important element of the partnership between him and his guide dog. The participant stated, "'I need to trust this animal with everything that I have.' I truly believe that the dog can sense whether you trust him or not and, if that trust is not there, then the team is probably not going to work" (p. 44). This statement was very similar to statements I heard from some of the mushers about their working relationships with sled dogs. I believe the idea of trust in human-working dog relationships points to a potentially fruitful area of study.

This trust bond that the mushers talked about demonstrates, in part, the depth that a musher-sled dog, and therefore an interspecies, relationship can have. It speaks to the potential of associations between more-than-human animals and humans. As I will discuss in the section that follows, relationships between humans and more-than-human animals do not always have to be human-dominated. They can also be about partnership.

Partnership

One of the ideas the mushers shared about the human-sled dog partnership was the musher's commitment and responsibility when it came to working with dogs. One example was the idea discussed by some participants that it was the *musher's* responsibility to communicate with dogs so that dogs could understand. Included was the idea several mushers shared about communicating and training sled dogs using a dog-pack mentality. For instance, several mushers talked about being the "alpha" in the relationship.

In the literature review I discussed the idea of anthropocentrism in Western society. In contrast to focusing on ideas such as interconnectedness and balance, an anthropocentric worldview places humans at the centre, as most important. Animals and the rest of nature are at the periphery. I discussed how viewing animals and nature from an anthropocentric ideology could contribute to environmental degradation by presenting nature as merely a resource to fulfill the needs and desires of humans (Bowers, 2001; Murphy 1996; Postma, 2002; Sandlos, 1998). When it comes to the concept of anthropocentrism, I found it interesting that while the mushers I interviewed did teach their dogs a few human words, for the most part they discussed the importance of understanding both dog mentality and dog ways of communicating as well as individual dog personalities, motivations, and feelings. This idea of working with dogs from a dog perspective or from a dog way of being makes a lot of sense, and the mushers who use this approach most likely do so because it works. In some ways this could be considered a dog-centred, rather than a human-centred (or anthropocentric) approach.

While mushing itself could be considered anthropocentric by some, given dogs are being used for human purposes such as the enjoyment of racing, making a living doing tours or trapping, and accessing wilderness areas in the winter, the mushers in my study proposed that in the partnership, the dogs are also gaining something in that they are being fed and cared for as well as being given the opportunity to run and pull. This idea that both humans and dogs contribute and benefit from the relationship is why the theme of partnership emerged.

In conclusion, mushers in my study engage in partnerships with their dogs. I believe this partnership is an example of a less human-centred, or anthropocentric approach, when it comes to relating with animals. Many of the mushers spoke about ways to communicate and relate in dog "language" (i.e., using and picking up on body language and cues and using a dog-pack mentality) so that the dogs would understand them. They also interpreted dogs' actions and perspectives for me during stories and anecdotes. I was intrigued by how much some of the mushers appeared to understand about dogs and what "being a dog" means. Most likely it results, in part, from the amount of time mushers spend with dogs. It is clear that feelings of dog-human partnership and interconnectedness can occur in the musher-sled dog relationship.

Learning

The participants in my study have learned many things through working with sled dogs. I will briefly discuss some of the individual and shared learnings of the mushers. There are lessons here not just for the mushers involved in my study, but also for non-mushers.

One of the two more common learnings discussed by mushers in my study was that having worked with sled dogs, they then work with people better. Other studies looking at the positive effect of animals on people have found that association with animals can transfer over to more positive relations with other people, as well as improved self-esteem and self-worth (Selby, 1995). Selby (1995) suggests in his handbook for humane education that learning compassion for animals does not necessarily entail ignoring pressing human concerns such as poverty and oppression, but rather that many global concerns are linked. For example, showing compassion for animals can have effects on how we treat the environment as well as implications for social justice. In other words, as some mushers in my study suggested, there are many linked benefits to learning how to work well with animals, including the ability to get along with people better.

Another aspect related to this could be an increased ability for empathy. Sanders (1999) discusses how empathy (or trying to understand things from the other's perspective) is a key element of social relations. He believes that when humans have this ability to empathize with dogs, it can lead to understanding dogs as sentient social beings. He writes:

> ....by imaginatively putting ourselves into the perspectives of the dogs with whom we have relationships we shape our encounters with them and, if we remain open to the practical evidence afforded by our experience, can reasonably come to see dogs as intelligent and full-fledged partners in social interaction. (p. 147)

Some studies have found that being able to feel empathy for animals can translate to human-directed empathy (Ascione, 1993). Ascione (1993) reviews research that suggests, for instance, that humane education programs that develop children's

knowledge and attitudes about animals can translate to feelings of empathy towards humans. The ability to have empathy for their sled dogs (e.g., trying to communicate and interact with dogs using a dog mentality) may be one reason why some mushers expressed an improved ability to work with human others better, having worked with dogs.

Conversely, research has also shown that there is a link between cruelty towards animals and violence against other humans (Selby, 1995). Some examples Selby (1995) cites include research that shows that in households where there is pet abuse, there is also an increased incidence of child abuse. As well, individuals who commit serial murders have a higher incidence of pet abuse behaviour as children. I believe that this points to the importance of developing appropriate positive relationships with other animals through interactions (e.g., with companion animals) or through humane education programs.

The other more common learning amongst the mushers was the idea that they have learned about the amazing capabilities of dogs through working with them. Four of the mushers were very clear that other people need to appreciate dogs more and not discount them. I believe that this is a useful lesson for educators. Before we really know someone it's important not to make judgments about who they are, or of what they are capable. Objectification, stereotyping, and conceptual segregation or separation of certain groups from others has helped to prop up oppressions related to race, gender, and class (Selby, 1995). Perhaps building relationships with others, be they people or animals, has the ability to break down false ideas and a sense of separation that contribute to these oppressions? Learning that sled dogs are individuals with personalities as well as having

respect for their capabilities is an example of how close association with animals can increase respect and appreciation for animal others. This is a lesson that can hopefully be transferred to human others as well. It also speaks again to the importance of building relationships with animal others as is often one of the goals of humane and environmental education.

Now that I have more experience interviewing, I believe I could have delved more deeply into the idea of learning with the mushers. I asked the mushers directly what they had learned through working with dogs and for the most part, left it at that. For the few mushers who struggled with the question, I realize now that I could have rephrased my questions. And, for all of the mushers I could have probed the idea of learning more deeply with questions such as, "How are you different now as opposed to before you worked with sled dogs?" or "What do you think a person who has never worked with sled dogs might gain from the experience?" I think the mushers may have had ideas about the broader implications and learnings had I delved more deeply and effectively into this topic.

However, there was one learning topic that several of the mushers felt was important for non-mushers to know about. It had to do with the treatment of sled dogs and occasional negative publicity associated with dog-sledding. At times individuals and animal rights groups have targeted dog-sledding as a cruel and inhumane activity. Several of my participants stated their desire to help non-mushers understand how much they care for and about their dogs, as well as how much the dogs enjoy mushing. While in my personal experience I've witnessed isolated incidents of cruelty within the mushing community, I do not think dog abuse is inherent in, or restricted to mushing. For

example, I have also witnessed pet owners' abuse of dogs. I understand that my point of view may be biased as a result of having been a musher myself. Nevertheless, I would have to agree with the mushers in my study who believe that most sled dogs seem to enjoy being sled dogs and that many dogs obtain adequate and, indeed, quality care from mushers. While I believe mushers who mistreat dogs should be investigated, I agree with the participants in my study who suggested mushing itself should not be targeted.

The themes revealed through this study seem to support the idea that many mushers really do care for and about their dogs (i.e., respect, trust, partnership). There are so many pressing and obvious concerns with regards to the treatment of animals that need attention. Take, for example, the more than five million stray and unwanted dogs and cats who are euthanized each year in the United States (Weil, 2004). Hopefully one of the broader learnings from this study will be the idea proposed by some participants that mushers do care for and about their dogs and that sled dogs can have quality lives.

Conclusion

"The relationship you have with the dogs, individually and as a team, is far away the most critical element to everything about the whole dog sledding experience" was a statement made by one musher at the end of his interview. In some ways it is a nice summation for this study that endeavoured to investigate the relationship between sled dogs and mushers, both the elements and the quality of this relationship. I found through my interviews that mushers feel they *do* have quality relationships with their sled dogs. They believe their sled dogs are individuals and getting to know the dogs is an important element of working well with them. They feel they have a partnership with their dogs

where both parties contribute. A good relationship with sled dogs is one that is built on trust, according to the mushers in my study. The mushers interviewed also have a lot of respect for their dogs' abilities and this respect is a result of all the experiences they've had working with them. Over time, the mushers have learned how to communicate with their dogs. They are able to understand some of what their dogs are thinking and feeling and some mushers believe their dogs have the ability to sense things about them as well. Finally, mushers learn things through working with dogs. Some learn compassion, some patience, some to be more observant. Other mushers find working with dogs has improved their abilities to work and relate with people better, or to appreciate the capabilities of another species.

In the broader context this study supports other research suggesting humans and other species of animals can engage in interspecies relationships. These can be quality relationships with multiple elements. According to the mushers in my study, dogs are sentient beings worthy of respect and consideration. My research leads me to advocate, like humane and environmental educators, that building relationships with other animals is vital, both for the implications this can have on how we as humans perceive and treat other animals as well as how we treat fellow humans. This finding has significant implications for education. Creating programs and opportunities for children and youth to have direct contact with animals is important. For example, students can be taken out into nature or given opportunities to learn about and interact with companion or working animals.

The other important finding in this study that has direct implications for education is the idea of sled dogs being individuals with personalities. Often in formal education,

animals are studied and portrayed as objects rather than subjects. For example, they are studied in labs outside of their natural environments. My research found that sled dogs are often seen by mushers as subjects or sentient beings with distinct personalities. I believe finding ways to teach about animals as subjects (rather than objects) within educational contexts is an important shift that needs to take place.

Of course we cannot all be mushers and many of us in Western society do not have direct daily contact with other animals. Having done this research, I conclude that an important part of understanding other animals is to take the time to listen and learn from the stories of those who spend their lives working and interacting with another species.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

- How did you get into dogs? (How did you get involved with mushing)?
- What do you enjoy most about working with sled dogs?
- How would you explain the experience of working with sled dogs to someone who has never worked with them before or has little idea about what mushing is all about?
- In what ways do you communicate and/or interact with your dogs?
- Is communicating with sled dogs a one-way process? If not, in what ways do your dogs communicate with you?
- What is important to know when communicating or interacting with your sled dogs?
- Do you have any interesting stories/experiences of working with a particular dog or a particular team of dogs?
- Do your sled dogs excel at anything in particular?
- In what ways, if any, is working with sled dogs an educational experience?
    - Have you learnt anything from working with sled dogs?
    - Have you learnt anything from the dogs themselves?
- Do you want to share any stories or experiences that demonstrate one aspect of the relationship between you and your dogs?
- Would you like to share any photos, art, or writing (i.e., journals or poetry) that might demonstrate an aspect of your relationship with sled dogs?
- Can you think of anything else important about the relationship between mushers and their sled dogs?
- What would you like other people to learn or know about human/sled dog relations? Why does that matter?

Appendix B: Cover Letter

Dear Potential Participant:

My name is Gail Kuhl and I am conducting a study in partial fulfillment of a Masters of Education degree at Lakehead University. My thesis topic is "Human-Sled dog Relations: What Can We Learn from the Stories and Experiences of Mushers?" Through interviewing mushers I hope to learn more about the elements and quality of the relationship between mushers and their sled dogs. I believe that by studying the relations between species we can gain important insights into both other species and ourselves as humans. Your knowledge and experience as a musher would add to the growing research that endeavors to understand how humans interact with other animals.

Your participation in my study would mean volunteering your time for an interview of approximately 60 minutes. During this interview you would share experiences and stories with me about working with sled dogs. I will ask some questions during the interview (there are no wrong answers) and you will also be free to share anything you feel is relevant to the topic. If you wish, after the interview, I can give you a copy of the transcript and you can change or adjust anything you wish.

I am also hoping to add an arts-based component to my study. If you have created any journal writing, poetry, art or have photos you feel demonstrate an aspect of your relationship with sled dogs, I would love to add these to my project.

Unless you state otherwise, the information you share with me will remain anonymous and I will use a pseudonym (fake name) in place of your name in both my thesis and any other material I may chose to publish after the completion of my study. However, if you do choose to submit photos, realize that someone reading my thesis (or other publications that come out of my research) may recognize you.

The interview transcripts will be stored at Lakehead University for seven years after which time they will be destroyed. Your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to drop out of this study at any point. If you would like, I will provide you with a written summary of my completed research (there is a place on the attached consent form to indicate your interest and address).

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at (807) 983-3331, or at gjkuhl@lakheadu.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Constance Russell at (807) 683-3315 or at crussell@lakeheadu.ca or Lakehead University's Research Ethics Board at (807) 343-8283.

Thank you so much for your participation.

Sincerely,

Appendix C: Consent Form

I, _____ have read the attached cover letter and am willing to participate in Gail Kuhl's study: MUSHER-SLED DOG RELATIONS: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE STORIES AND EXPERIENCES OF MUSHERS? The purpose of this study has been explained to me and I understand that:

1. Participating in this study is voluntary and I can withdraw from the study at any time for any reason.
2. I may choose not to answer any question I am asked during the interview.
3. There is no apparent risk to participating in this study.
4. My identity will be protected and I will remain anonymous in any publication or public presentation of the research findings, unless I explicitly choose otherwise.
5. The transcripts (data) from the research will be stored at Lakehead University for seven years after which time they will be destroyed.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

Please provide an address below if you are interested in receiving a summary of this research or reviewing the transcripts from your interview (please indicate if you are interested in a research summary, reviewing your transcript, or both).

Appendix D: Consent Form for Use of Photographs

I, _____ understand that photographs where I am the subject may not be used without my written consent. I give Gail Kuhl permission to use photographs of me:

- ☐ in her final thesis
- ☐ at a research presentation (such as an academic conference)
- ☐ in other publications (e.g. books, magazines)

_____ _____

Signature Date