# ANIMALS, SPORT, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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**Purpose –** *To outline the multiple ways in which animals are inserted into sporting practices, outline historical and contemporary approaches to studying human-animal sporting practices, and advocate for the centring of sociological problems in human-animal research in sporting contexts and cultures and for considering such problems in relation to environmental issues.*

**Design/methodology/approach --** *In the first part of the chapter, conceptual differentiation of animals in the animal-sport complex is presented. Subsequently, studies of interspecies sport are reviewed with reference to the 'animal turn' in the literature. In the second part, a critique is presented relating to: i) the privileging of companion animals, especially dogs and horses, which overlooks the multiple ways animals are integrated into (multispecies) sport; ii) micro-sociological and insider ethnographies of companionship displacing of sociological problems in favour of relationship perspectives; and iii) the environment as absent from analysis. The conclusion offers implications for understanding multispecies sport and the environment.*

**Findings --** *I chart a general shift in emphasis and focus from animals as an 'absent-presence' in pursuit of sociological knowledge towards a clearly defined focus on interspecies sport as a field of research characterised by investigations of relationships with companion animals through the 'animal turn.'*

**Research limitations/implications –** *The focus on companion species means other animals (i.e., non-companions) are understudied, big picture sociological questions are often side-lined, environmental concerns marginalised, and sociological understanding of the environment more generally is either ignored or reduced to a conduit of human-animal interactions.*

**Keywords:** Human-animal studies; sport; interspecies sport; multispecies sport; sociology; sensitising concepts; animal-sport complex

## INTRODUCTION

The study of animals in and through sport challenges historically pervasive views of sport, as an activity and topic of study, concerned solely with human interests. However, contemporary sociological research on animals in sport tends to rehearse longstanding debates regarding differing levels of subjectivity, cognition, agency, suffering and pleasure experienced by animals vis-à-vis humans in their relationships in and through sport. This chapter begins by reviewing briefly the multiple ways animals are inserted into sport through eight conceptual types of typical involvement of animals (Atkinson and Gibson, 2014) in the animal-sport complex (Young, 2017). Subsequently, I review the study of animals in sport and the so-called 'animal turn'. While not strictly chronological, I approach the human-animal sport literature with a historical sensibility to chart a general shift in emphasis and focus of research. I demonstrate that animals have, in the past, been included in research on sport, albeit as an 'absent-presence'. The animal turn, however, has foregrounded animals in academic investigations. Many celebrate the animal turn in sport-related research as evidence of a much-needed decentring of the human subject, indicative of broader shifts in society that challenge anthropocentrism, human exceptionalism and human exemptionalism.

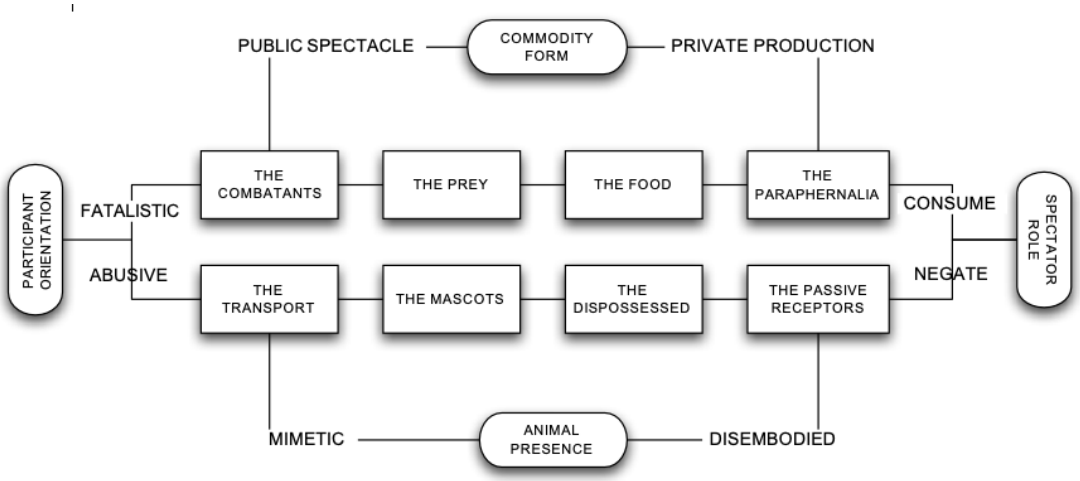
However, as Campbell (2019) reminds us, "turns to" are accompanied by "turns away." I argue that while the animal turn has moved animals from the periphery to the core of analyses, theoretical considerations and sociological problems, including social action, order, and change have been displaced. Such displacement has furnished empirical detail of the animal-sport complex, albeit with limited advances in sociological insight. More specifically, acknowledging and describing human-animal entanglement is an insufficient response to both anthropocentrism conceptually and the real-world challenges anthropogenic activity creates. Indeed, through the animal turn, animal-sport complex research has not fully engaged with the paradox of relationality (Giraud 2019). Said differently, researchers have not acknowledged sufficiently non-human animals and objects that (would) resist or even reject insertion into interspecies sport activities and relations, or forms of politics (including environmental politics) in opposition to the effects of interspecies sport. As such, I argue companionship perspectives risks perpetuating a fascination with the self and attendant accentuating of human characteristics (i.e.,

agency) in non-human animals concomitantly privileges particular non-human animals (usually dogs and horses) while marginalising other non-human others and the environment.

All told, the recent and rapid growth of the field, which includes numerous monographs and journal articles, at least two journal special issues, and an edited collection published in the last five years is evidence of vitality and interest, but not necessarily innovation or advancement. Indeed, I argue that researchers have turned away from what Arluke and Sanders (1996 p. 5) identified as a core question for human-animal research, namely: "what it is about modern society that makes it possible for people to shower animals with affection and to maltreat or kill them, to regard them as sentient creatures and also as utilitarian objects. How is it that people seem able to balance such significantly conflicting values and live comfortably with such contradiction?"

## THE ANIMAL-SPORT COMPLEX: HOW ARE ANIMALS INTEGRATED INTO SPORT?

Animals are inserted into sport in multiple ways. Young (2017) posits the need to understand multispecies sport as an animal-sport complex. The need arises, for Young (2017), not because of the insertion of animals into sport, but the presence of humans that "renders the animal-sport relation a fundamentally *social* one and underlines the necessity of bringing a sociological imagination to this relationship" (p.81, emphasis in original). Similarly Figure One, developed by Mike Atkinson in our previous work (Atkinson and Gibson, 2014), articulates conceptual differences in the ways animals are inserted into the animal-sport complex.




Animal presence ranges from participant orientation to spectator role. In participant orientation events, animals are a public spectacle: hypervisible, present, and publicly consumed. Animal presence is somewhat mirrored by the commodity form. Drawing on Bermond (1997), Young (2017) explains that despite wide acceptance that animals experience physical pain and suffering, it is still a widely held, dominant cultural assumption that animals do not experience pain and suffering reflexively, psychologically, or emotionally (i.e., like humans). This standpoint facilitates mastery over animals as a cultural norm. Concomitantly economic activities rooted in animal exploitation and suffering continue because "animals become culturally viewed as 'commodities' to be inserted into a full range of human economic exploits" (p. 80). Correspondingly, the commodity form of animal insertion ranges from public spectacle to private production.

The most obvious and visible activities present animals as *combatants*. Clearly this refers to animal blood sports but also includes nonviolent forms such as dog agility. Like combatants, animals as *transport* in dressage, horse racing, rodeo, and dogsledding, for example, are visible and publicly consumed. While some animal owners (and insider, multispecies ethnographers) might balk at their companion animal being labelled combatant rather than, say, player or athlete, combatants (violent or otherwise) are inserted into sporting activities, strategically, by humans for human amusement and gain. Furthermore, the notion of animals-as-combatants retains historical sensitivity to animal sports emerging from baiting and war activities. This position does not preclude animal agency or animals enjoying events. Nor does it contradict Haraway's (2007) argument that humans and animals, by nature of our

involvement in sport and elsewhere, come to mutually constitute one another. Rather, it reminds us that from the baiting pit to the agility course, the nature, structure, and organisation of sport is largely on human terms and for human benefits.

Victimization and abuse may be present in public spectacles such as rodeo (Young and Gerber, 2014). It also may not be present, as in dressage and canicross. However, drawing on Goffman's (1959) notions of social settings having 'front' and 'back' regions, Young (2017) highlights how the public spectacles will all have preparation and treatment away from the public. Oftentimes back region activies are dominated by victimization and abuse, which consumers of events would likely not endorse, most notably in cases of inhumane treatment of racing dogs (Atkinson & Young, 2005) and euthanization of rodeo competitors (Young & Gerber, 2014). What demarcates private production from the back region of public consumption is the spectator role and disembodiment.

Disembodiment can be symbolic and/or literal. Animals are physically and socially negated as living, sentient creatures. For example, animals are slaughtered for body parts in consumption as *paraphernalia* and *food*. Here we can extend the 'absent referent' identified by Adams (1999, p.13):

> The "absent referent" is that which separates the meat eater from the animal and the animal from the end product. The function of the absent referent is to keep our 'meat' separated from any idea that she or he was once an animal, to keep the 'moo' or 'cluck' or 'baa' away from the meat, to keep something from being seen as having been someone. Once the existence of meat is disconnected from the existence of an animal who was killed to become that "meat," meat becomes unanchored by its original referent (the animal).

Importantly, what is absent is not the animal *per se* (they are present in disembodied, rather than mimetic, form), but their death and a direct, original referent. To paraphrase Adams (1999), sports equipment is disconnected from the existence of an animal who was killed to become that equipment. While synthetic materials are more common, often on the grounds of superior performance, leather is still ubiquitous in sport. To appreciate the importance of the absent referent concept, consider, for example, the difference in "existence of an animal" between wearing 'leather' as opposed to 'brined, limed, dehaired, desalted cow (or possibly dog) skin' boots next time you take to a sports field.

The presence of animals in sporting contexts mostly reinforces pre-existing practices and hierarchies, rather than prompting reconsideration of our relationship with animals. As such, animals tend to be emplaced within physical practices mimetically (Elias & Dunning, 1986) as proxies for other forms of social aggression, violence, and/or risk. Hollin (2019) advances a mimetic analysis by highlighting biomimetic technologies in sport. More specifically, Hollin (2019) examines the development of technological interventions into the "concussion epidemic" modelled on woodpeckers and rams. Biomimesis here indicates not only a subtle, yet important, shift in the mimetic presence of animals but also further underscores how drawing animals into sport often perpetuates, rather than challenges, the status quo of existing inequalities and inequities. More traditionally, animals are present (either literally or via humans mimicking animals), as *mascots.* Mascots have gained attention relatively recently as part of anti-racist action. Slowikowski (1993) and Slovenko (1994) argue that animal mascots are selected because they are seen to embody particularly valued traits and characteristics, with bulldogs, eagles, and tigers serving as common animal mascots. While mascots of all kinds facilitate powerful identifications with teams (Callais, 2010), Satore-Baldwin (2017) argues that the revenue generated seldom supports initiatives or attempts to support the habitat or animals themselves. As such, researchers have explored the possibilities of leveraging interest in animal mascots for environmental campaigns to benefit the animals (Baltz and Ratnaswamy, 2000; Satore-Baldwin and McCullough, 2019).

Animals are inserted into the animal-sport complex as *prey,* most commonly in hunting practices, but also fishing and bird-watching. The hunting literature, which we shall return to, is complex and nuanced. Within the animal-sport complex, attention must also be given to animals gentrified by the development of sport spaces for humans, as *the dispossessed.* While mapped by Millington and Wilson (2014), there are significant opportunities for animal-sport researchers can take theoretical and political lead from decolonisation scholars who are already challenging and documenting "environmental destruction, land dispossession or forced relocation" (Whyte, 2018 p.225) inflicted by historically and economically privileged protagonists. Finally, animals can be *passive receptors* (a broad and complex category) involving neglect and/or mistreatment of animals by their owners in the process of sports spectating. This might include tying a dog outside all day or

confining them to a locked space when hosting a sports party, or the use of whole-animals in sports-performance research.

To reiterate, the above is presented as a sensitising concept to underscore and visualise the multiple ways animals are inserted into sport and how multiple animals can be inserted simultaneously into any given sport. Elsewhere, I have studied how these different insertions present conflict and competition between animals (Gibson, 2014). Here it is sufficient to note that not only is sport often multispecies, but also that any given sport will likely have animal involvement beyond the main combatants.

## THE ANIMAL TURN: HOW HAVE ANIMALS BEEN STUDIED IN SPORT?

The rise in interest in multispecies sport (cf. Danby et al. 2019) notwithstanding, sporting practices involving animals have received scholarly attention for decades. Indeed, forty years ago sociologist Clifton Bryant argued for a "zoological focus" as part of a critique of sociologists ignoring "the permeating social influence of animals in our larger cultural fabric and our more idiosyncratic individual modes of interaction and relationships" (Bryant, 1979, p.400). Then, as now, sociological and cultural research focused predominantly on human activities, relationships, and practices. However, while not foregrounded, animals were not absent. Firstly, animals in/as sport were studied empirically with the aim of understanding sociological problems, most notably social order and social change. Secondly, this work was often agenda-setting and discipline-establishing.

For example, foxhunting, Elias (2008) argues, can only be understood as concomitant with broader social, cultural, and psychological changes. Accepting Green and colleagues' (2005) criticism that Elias' study of the pacification of early sporting forms, including fox-hunting, was empirically weaker than necessary, Elias' theorisation attempts to understand the sociogenesis of structural changes in social organisation and social control of violence, and the psychogenesis of attitudes towards violence and emotional restraint (see Malcolm 2005, 2019). More specifically, Elias identifies how changes in rules and conventions for the hunt - particularly shifts in focus from edible prey and for hounds to 'kill by proxy' - emphasised the pleasure of the chase relative to the kill. These processes reciprocally

and recursively shaped collective habituses and forms of social organisation. Elias writes:

> The direction of the changes in the manner of hunting which one can find by comparing the English fox-hunting ritual with earlier forms of hunting shows very clearly the general direction of a civilizing spurt. Increasing restraints upon the use of physical force and particularly upon killing, and, as an expression of these restraints, a displacement of the pleasure experienced in doing violence to the pleasure experienced in seeing violence done, can be observed as symptoms of a civilizing spurt in many other spheres of human activity. As has been shown, they are all connected with moves in the direction of the greater pacification of a country in connection with the growth, or with the growing effectiveness of, the monopolization of physical force by the representatives of a country's central institutions. They are connected, furthermore, with one of the most crucial aspects of a country's internal pacification and civilization - with the exclusion of the use of violence from the recurrent struggles for control of these central institutions, and with the corresponding conscience-formation (Elias, 2008 p. 163)

Similarly, Clifford Geertz (1972) – an anthropologist trained by sociologist Talcott Parsons - provides an insightful analysis of Balinese social order through his study of cockfighting. Geertz followed the disciplinary lead of notable anthropologists such as E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1956), Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) and Mary Douglas (1966) and their observations regarding the cultural importance of animals. From a stronger empirical evidence base than Elias, Geertz provides intimate details of the structure and organisation of cockfights from pre-match preparation and care of cocks to the importance and functioning of in-match gambling. In doing so, he "traces the migration" of Balinese cultural norms – including, for example, gendered practices and status hierarchies – to their embodiment in and through the cockfight as:

> Psychologically an Aesopian representation of the ideal/demonic, rather narcissistic male self, sociologically it is an equally Aesopian representation of the complex fields of tension set up by the controlled, muted, ceremonial, but for all that deeply felt, interaction of those selves in the context of everyday life. The cocks may be surrogates for their owner's personalities, animal mirrors of psychic form, but the cockfight is - or more exactly, deliberately is made to be - a simulation of the social matrix (Geertz, 1973 p.17).

Similarly, animal blood sports have been studied extensively (e.g., Hawley, 1989; Wade, 1990; Worden & Darden, 1992; Evans & Forsyth, 1997; Windeatt, 1982; Kalof & Taylor, 2007) precisely because they provide insight into how collective actions and social and cultural norms help explain social actions as opposed to common-sense accounts of individual (pathological) personalities and behaviours.

Such work obviously antedates the animal turn in sport and leisure as identified by Danaby et al. (2019). Equally obvious, this work does *not* mark the emergence of clearly articulated research programmes and an associated body of literature that centres animals in analyses of sport. This is attributable, at least in part, to Elias and Geertz focusing on sociological and cultural problems and core disciplinary questions (Elias on social change and Geertz on social organisation) rather than animal experiences.

By way of response, the development of a recognisable sub-discipline of animals in sport research has clearly established a need to attend to nonhuman actors and animals in sport and leisure. That is, that sport has tended to be viewed, incorrectly, as an exclusively human endeavour. As such, while Young (2017) is correct to identify that research on animal sports has historically focused on highly-contested activities, the animal turn in sport demonstrates a recent, significant shift in interest to largely-accepted, quotidian activities. This is partly because such uncontested and seemingly unproblematic activities have been overlooked, also partly as a response to broader academic developments regarding the need to attend to non-human actors and animals in research. The development of a subdisciplinary field of scholarship studying interspecies sport is prompted most obviously by Haraway's (2007) boundary-crossing and field-defining scholarship.

In the first instance, then, the animal turn reflects increasing interest in moving beyond exclusively human (social) actions and concerns. In effect, researchers began to explicitly acknowledge and address nonhuman actors beyond how they affect human outcomes (Catlin et al., 2013; Danaby et al., 2019). As such, researchers in sport have explored, in depth, "being with nonhuman animals" (Haraway, 2003) through a range of practices in which, purposefully or otherwise, humans and animals co-evolve and co-inhabit space (Lynch, 2019). More specifically, such research interests are most advanced in human-canine and human-equine relationships (e.g., Carr 2014; Dashper, 2016; Fletcher and Platt, 2018; Sanders, 1999). For example, scholars have addressed dog agility and canicross as examples of emotional attachment, assignment of meaning to activities, and negotiation of action between humans and dogs (Baldwin & Norris, 1999; Hultsman, 2012; Gillespie, Leffler, & Lerner, 2002; Merchant, 2019; Nottle & Young, 2019). Similarly, studies of the

‘equiscape’ - the multifaceted cultural and geographical field of human-equine leisure practices - chart processes of emotional connection, negotiated participation, and identity markers in human-equine encounters (Dashper, 2012, 2016; Dashper, Abbott, & Wallace, 2019; Gilbert & Gillett, 2012; Wipper, 2000). Ultimately, the intimate and mutually constitutive relationships of humans and animals in play and work manifest as studies of companion species.

Conceptualising animals as companion species is driven by fundamental questioning of how - not whether! - non-human animals experience suffering and pleasure. Haraway (2003, 2007) reignited (cf. Arluke and Sanders, 1996) in-depth exploration of what these pleasures, pains, cognitions, and agencies mean for human relationships with animals in our homes, on the streets, on the farm, and in medical laboratories. In the context of sport, this results in researching human-animal relationships in and through interspecies sport and leisure activities. Daspher (2016 p. 12) succinctly summarises the general approach of companionship perspectives in her own research, which is designed to “understand how horses and humans come into contact with each other, become entangled and engaged with each other, shape each other, through various different sport and leisure-related practices.” As such, the animal turn has shifted focus from core questions of social order, social action, and social change, to social interaction and the mutual constituting nature of human-animal relationships.

Understanding interspecies sport as examples of human-animal companionship and co-constitution has been developed most successfully through “multispecies” ethnographic work. A thoroughgoing explanation of ethnographic research is certainly beyond the scope of this chapter; interested readers should consult Arluke and Sanders (1996 pp.18-40) who, although not using the term multispecies, identify and explore core methodological and theoretical challenges for the field. Of particular importance here is the articulation of inside and incursive ethnographies with animals. Classically, insider ethnography involves researchers studying situations where their personal relationships and investments predate the research project. Incursive ethnography, then, involves researchers entering new situations and environments. Following the animal turn in sport and leisure, insider ethnography is a hallmark of multispecies and more-than-human work. This is

attributable to practical considerations of ease of entrée, for example. Epistemologically, the ability to reproduce "a complete and emotionally informed account, not just of the human perspective, but also that of the animal" (Arluke and Sanders, 1996, p.29) is a defining feature of insider, multispecies ethnography. As such, Danaby et al. (2019) have encouraged "researchers to think beyond our taken-for-granted humanist frameworks and to consider explicitly the ways in which leisure spaces and practices are co-produced, shaped and experienced by human and nonhuman animals, and what those multispecies encounters add to understandings of leisure as integral to our well-being and happiness in contemporary societies."

## TOWARDS MULTISPECIES ACCOUNTS: WHAT ARE WE (NOT) STUDYING?

As evidenced through Figure One, companionship perspectives account for a extremely small aspect of the animal-sport complex but are grossly over-represented in the literature. Below I draw attention to key shortcomings in the literature defined by companion species perspectives. Importantly, I return here to the point I made at the beginning of this review regarding the role of violence in sport as posited by Elias, and debates around his position (cf. Green et al. 2005; Malcolm, 2002, 2005, 2019; Stokvis, 2002, 2005). That is, while violence is not *the* central problem for sociological understanding of human-animal relations and interspecies sport, violence is nonetheless central to the sociological problem (cf. Campbell, 2019) of interspecies sport. At its core, then, the task here goes beyond asking the sobering question of how richly rewarded animals are through companion relationships around the sporting field to acknowledging the differing roles animals assigned to animals. Additionally, as I will argue, there remains a need to address how we have largely failed to attend to the environment.

### *Animals and/as Extended Selves*

As evidenced above, there is a preponderance of studies on dogs and horses. As such, understanding human-animal engagements and co-constitution in sport is often predicated on privileging certain animals and their associated concepts of animal insertion in sport. Said differently, different forms of animal integration are relatively overlooked and understudied. Links here can be made to Durkheim's (1958, 1964)

studies of moral individualism and identification of the cult of the individual as well as Beck's (1998) individualization thesis given the emphasis placed on the incompleteness of self, individual rights, and identification of biographical solutions presented to systemic problems contradictions: only the closest of animal companions in developed Western societies (i.e., dogs and horses) are foregrounded; only the closest of animal companions are afforded the opportunity to form emotional bonds with humans; only the closest of animal companions have any resemblance to "rights-holder status" (Francione 2008; Wise, 2001). Contra the claims found in extant literature (e.g., Danaby et al. 2019), "multispecies" work often focuses narrowly on particular, privileged non-human animals – concomitantly overlooking the other, subordinate, less privileged roles animals occupy in (multispecies) sport events. For example, consider the difference between the way equestrians love horses and their co-constitutive role in events and, what I have witnessed first-hand, the way some equestrians love pigs and their constitution in bread rolls at events. To this we could also juxtapose the plight of the horses in events with those of the cows that make their leather saddles and boots. Examples of this kind have profound sociological and environmental consequences. The most obvious of which is Durkheim's (1964 p. 399) reflection on collective moral sentiments as "duties of the individual towards himself [sic] are, in reality, duties towards society." As such, the lazy projection of the individual researcher's moral sentiments as sociological process becomes an unintended defining feature of multispecies sport ethnography. Put simply, even when the human is decentred, only a small proportion of animals are afforded the opportunity to express agency – a fact reflected in the preponderance of human-dog and human-horse research. While glib, the examples above underscore the privileging of particular animals as the focus of research and concomitant questions of rights.

Lorimer (2013) has articulated that perspectives that foreground essential human characteristics (i.e., agency) in non-humans as a basis for the extension of rights reinforces particularised privilege: that is, rights are afforded only to a select few. This process resonates with Belk's (1988) identification of the incorporation of animals into the *extended self*. For example, like Dashper (2016), Belk (1988) argues that our relationships with companion animals different only by degrees from our relationships with humans. Unlike Dashper (2106), Belk (1988) argues that animals become part of an extended self in a manner more akin to objects than other people

because of people's ability to exert greater control, relatively speaking, over animals than humans. Expanding this point, Arluke and Sanders (1996) provide detailed accounts of the nuances and complications of how people interact with, and define, companion animals particularly how people express their own orientation, desires, or concerns through animals. This resonates with Belk's (1988) explanation of processes of emotional investment and identification as significant sources of both meaning and self. Therefore, interspecies sport research is often predicated on researchers importing companion animals into their biographies through action as combatants and through social processes of individualization and th self as articulated by Beck (1998).

Goode's (2006) eponymously-titled *Playing With <u>My</u> Dog* (emphasis added) provides a prototypical example. Consider, also, Dashper's (2017) relationship with Charlie-Mo, Merchant's (2019) study of cani-cross with 'A', and Dashper and colleagues (2019, p. 5) identification as "firmly-established horse lovers, we are all deeply embedded within and committed to the norms of the 'horse world'". When companionship is juxtaposed with the extended self in the context of studying animals in sport, the field is at serious risk of theoretical and methodological shortcomings identified in the sociology and humanities field at large. Following Cole (1994 p. 148), then, companionship potentially results in researchers sidestepping pressing theoretical challenges and core problems in favour of "descriptive work that is motivated by their personal interests and sometimes experience. Most of this research has virtually no impact on the growth of sociological knowledge because its results are not relevant for any important sociological problems." Companionship may disrupt anthropocentric perspectives. Companionship does raise significant challenges and blindspots especially, as Giraud (2019) notes, when assuming more ethical, or indeed less anthropocentric, interactions proceed inherently from recognising the co-constitutive nature of human-animal relationships.

### *Agency and Other Sociological Problems*

The nature, structure, flow, and outcome of companion relationships generally, and sport especially, are determined by humans. Indeed, Elias (2008) studied foxhunting through close readings of rule changes governing the practice. Similarly, my own work on hunting highlights how changes in the law alter the moral status of animals

and how hunting is conducted through exclusion and/or at the expense of other species (Gibson, 2014). However, Daspher (2019: 136) argues:

> whilst horses may not be involved in leisure with humans on the same terms as the human partner, they can and do exercise some agency in their interactions with humans in leisure spaces, although this agency may differ to that exercised by the human partner. Horses are not passive participants in human leisure; they shape those leisure encounters through their actions and reactions, bringing their own personalities and experiences to the encounter, and forming bonds with some humans and not others. Therefore the role of nonhuman animals, like horses, in leisure cannot be compared to other nonhuman aspects of leisure experiences, like bikes or boats.

Similarly, Nottle and Young (2019), Ford (2019), and Merchant (2019), for example, reflect on the enabling and constraining elements of animal agency. Acknowledging the ability afforded to certain animals to exercise agency bears the hallmarks of what Beck (1998) identified as *internalised democracy:* the belief in equity in relationships. If we accept, as I believe we should, Arluke and Sanders (1996) contention that core challenges for human-animal studies include understanding the social arrangements that facilitate not only blatant contradictions regarding how animals are (mis)treated but also how these contradictions are naturalised and perpetuated, then we must necessarily acknowledge the inequity of relationships. Indeed, the disruption of anthropocentrism through studying animal companionship perpetuates individualization processes as explained by Beck (1998).

More specifically, the production of thick descriptions of companion species rests on biographical solutions to systemic contradictions (Beck, 1998). Therefore, multispecies ethnographers often replicate the kind of ethnographic investigations identified by Herbert Gans twenty-years ago as defined by "preoccupation with self.… devoted to inventing new moral discourses and establishing new research ethics, as well as reporting personal injustice and personal aspects of social injustice and obtaining catharsis and therapy for both researcher and readers" (p.542). Implicitly, this illustrates the potential myopia of focusing on companionship generally, and the researcher's own animal companions specifically, as the theoretical and empirical basis of studying the animal-sport complex. In doing so, it also fails to challenge sport participants to examine if and how animals become involved in sport practices thereby limiting the possibility for social change.

Conceptually, following Blumer (1931), it is worth considering, whether companionship is functioning as a common-sense rather than sensitizing concept in the context of the animal turn. The central difference between the two is the extent, power, and purpose of abstraction. Common-sense concepts for Blumer (1931, p. 523) are "more a matter of feeling than of logical discernment" (Blumer, 1931 p. 523) and help to communicate and understand experience. Sensitizing concepts, however, focus on revision of understanding as well as the content of the concept. As a result, common-sense concepts are "more static and more persistent with content unchanged…. there is little occasion for the uncovering of new facts and so for challenging and revising the concept" (Blumer, 1931 p.524). Consider, for example, how studies of companionship oftentimes return to debates regarding differing levels of subjectivity and positionality, cognition and identity, agency and moral status of animals. As I have indicated above, these are not necessarily sociological processes but the outcomes of such, most notably individualization. Here, we are at risk of mistaking novel social situations for novel sociological understanding. This is particularly pertinent in a field dominated by insider ethnography because of the potential for processes of individualization and the extended self to be magnified by the difficulties for insiders to minimize their prejudice tied down as they are "by habit, piety, and precedent." (Simmel 1950, p. 407; see also Aguilar, 1981). A risk manifest in, and magnified through, researchers on animals in sport overlooking the environment.

### *Animals, Sport and the Environment*

David Chernushenko (1994) is widely credited with setting the agenda for studying sport and the environment. Indeed, the editors of this volume comment that "many of the key themes Chernushenko identifies around the politics of space, around consumer culture and environmental destruction, and around sport-related activism and opportunities for social change are at the core of subsequent work in the sociology of sport field" (Wilson and Millington, 2013, p.131). For example, Chernushenko identifies material relationships between sport and the environment, including the direct environmental impact of sporting activities such as damaging wetlands and soil erosion, environmental impacts of sporting organisations and facilities, broader impacts of sporting events, and production and distribution of

sporting goods. Further, the direct impact of consumer culture, business principles, and environmental politics are identified as well as the ways in which market logics and political interests can undermine sustainability imperatives. From there, scholars have examined a number of environment-related topics and issues related to sport, as outlined by Wilson and Millington (2013). The animal-sport complex, however, has received no such attention.

Furthermore, perspectives that accentuate human characteristics in non-human animals manifests in privileging not only certain non-human animals but also marginalising other non-human others and the environment. I have argued that the centring of companion animals has resulted in the decentring of sociological questioning. Building from the above conceptualisation of the animal-sport complex, we can see that the narrow focus on relationships has meant that little attention has been devoted to understanding the environmental impact of animal-participant orientation activities, dispossession, and consumption. Said differently, the avowed *multi*species approach in sport has more typically been *inter*species given it focuses on human-combatant and human-transport dyads.

Perhaps because they take place in so-called natural environments, environmental issues are, comparatively speaking, most often foregrounded in studies of (and also by those who participate in) interspecies sports such as hunting and fishing (inserting animals as prey and dispossessed). Specifically, it is around these sports that scholars and participants have, arguably, the most developed understanding of the environmental impact of animal-participant orientation activities and arguably take truly multispecies perspectives (cf. Gibson, 2014). Like all human-animal interactions, hunting involves certain species defined as valuable for certain consumptive practices. Such definitions are the result of social values, cultural practices, geographical proximity, and historical precedent at least as much as any inherent qualities of the animals themselves. Furthermore, hunting and fishing places killing, ethics, wildlife management, and rewilding front-and-centre, which reveals the tensions that have emerged in relation to existing attempts to ground an ethics and politics in the recognition of relationality. As such, analyses of the environmental influences on collective action and rationalization (von Essen, 2019; von Essen, van Hejigen, and Gieser, 2019), embodied social action (Markuksela and Vatonen, 2019),

and exploring conflicts in animal and environmental standpoints (Gibson, 2014; Linnell et al. 2005; Marvin 2000, 2003; Sjölander-Lindqvist, 2015) have been undertaken. Developing sociological understanding further in interspecies sport more broadly will require acknowledging how power, inequality, and violence manifest not only through exploitation but also exclusion (Giraud, 2019).

Similarly, while diametrically opposed given the lack of killing, the equiscape has significant challenges to address. For example, as gleaned from tourism and management literature, a brief and non-exhaustive list of the potential environmental impacts of horse riding include: introduction of alien species, soil erosion and degradation, fouling of waterways, spread of plant diseases, and alteration of fauna including monocultural production of feed (Newsome et al 2004; Schmudde, 2015). These challenges are particularly acute when access to land is contested through desire to acquire land for housing, economic activity, and/or for environmental protection. Furthermore, horses, like any livestock, present significant challenges vis-a-vis climate change through their impacts on air quality. Unlike other livestock, though, horses are more frequently transported to and from events as opposed to the one-time, one-way trips to abattoirs for livestock. Horse transportation necessarily requires high-powered vehicles under heavy loads, which obviously increases vehicle emissions. Such factors are seldom mentioned by equiscape researchers.

The environmental threats and dangers of hosting (mega)events and stadia construction are well documented. However, dispossession of animals, while acknowledged (e.g., Boykoff, 2013; Boykoff and Mascarenhas, 2016), is seldom analysed. Millington and Wilson (2014), however, identify competing and contested practices of environmental destruction and preservation through the development of golf courses as habited and habitable for a range of animals. As alluded to above, there are significant opportunities for developing understanding dispossession through competing interests and issues of climate, land, dislocation, and degradation through the impact of colonialism (Whyte, 2018). Rounding out dispossession analyses will require attending to the multiple and competing animal interests in locations where sporting activities are conducted. This should range from the relatively closed environments of stadia, golf courses, and facilities to the more open environments of lifestyle sports such as the ocean, rivers, lakes, and wilderness areas. Taking note of

the multiple inhabitants of these areas and the conceptual differentiations presented above, a challenge for researchers will be further developing sociological understanding of and praxis related to adjudicating conflicting interests. Usually this is applied regarding whether humans have the right to alter the environment (purposefully or otherwise) for their own amusement. However, this will necessitate understanding the basis of intervening on behalf of species in conflict.

The politics of animals as food (or not) in sport have begun to pique the interests of researchers. Satore-Baldwin (2017) reports that approximately 18.5 million hot dogs were consumed during the 2014 Major League Baseball games, and nearly 74 million tonnes of chicken wings were consumed during the 2016 Super Bowl. Consumption on this scale has obvious implications for climate change and biodiversity. Although environmental issues are not their central concern, Brady and Ventresca (2014) have explored the "co-constituting" nature of food and masculine subjectivities through veganism and sport. With greater acknowledgement of environmental concerns and complexities, King and Weedon (2019) draw attention to the complexities of whey. More specifically, they trace the ebb and flow of environmental triumphs and disasters in the creation of whey as a nutritional supplement and socio-technical fix. To return to Beck (2004), such socio-technical fixes may well require considering that it is the success, rather than crisis, of modernity that produces these consequences. This is a question of obvious sociological interest and import.

## CONCLUSION

Paraphrasing the introduction of the *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* special issue on sport, leisure, and the environment published a decade ago (Mincyte, Casper, and Cole, 2009), there is not only significant opportunity but also a demonstrable need for researchers to cross-pollinate environmental sociology's challenge to human exemptionalism with human-animal studies' challenge to anthropocentrism. Indeed, if my brief sketch and analysis of the interspecies sport literature above is correct, then not only are we failing to build sufficient sociological understanding, but any sociological analysis of animals in sport not including the environment will be limited. Following Giraud (2019), I would suggest that simply acknowledging sport

as more-than-human is insufficient to addresses problems – sociological or otherwise – born of anthropogenic activities..

As Ingold (1994 p. 1) observed, "just as humans have a history of their relations with animals, so also animals have a history of their relations with humans. Only humans, however, construct *narratives* of this history." In reflecting on and responding to the narratives of interspecies sport, my main goal is to encourage reflection on and change in the dominant narrative of companionship. For me, change is required because understanding co-constitutive human-animal relationships is necessary, yet insufficient, for three related reasons. First, as dominated by studies of human-horse and human-dog activities, interspecies sport research risks perpetuating a fascination with the self. As such, I have identified the need for considering how individualisation has manifested in human-animal studies as companionship relationships and perspectives provide insight into what Beck (1998) identified as the fundamental incompleteness of the self. Second, attempted decentring of the human has resulted in enriched empirical detail but incomplete sociological understanding. Such understanding resonates with the paradox of relationality (Giraud 2019) where researchers have insufficiently addressed non-human animals and objects that are either resistant to or would outright reject insertion into their interspecies sport activities and relations. Furthermore, little consideration is given to forms of politics, among which we could count environmental politics, that actively oppose the effects of interspecies sport. Finally, and most tellingly, acknowledging and describing the entanglement of more-than-human sporting activities is insufficient in response to anthropocentrism generally and the challenges anthropogenic activity creates.

I have offered, then, conceptual differentiation of animal insertion into the animal-sport complex as a sensitising concept for the consideration of the field. Although I obviously have my own interests and predilections, my purpose is not to police theoretical perspectives or methodologies.. Importantly, neither of these concepts impose any particular theoretical perspective on research. They do, however, require us to address and acknowledge factors that extend beyond specific human-animal relationships to a greater extent – that is, to push interspecies perspectives into truly multispecies ones. From Belk (1988), to Arluke and Sanders (1996), to Young (2017), the animal-sport complex serves as a sensitising concept to point us toward

consideration of the social structures, situations, and stratifiers influencing the forms of animal commodification that are deemed permissible within given cultures at given times in given places - and those that are no. To this we must necessarily add environmental questions. Further, what I offer is not the definitive conceptualization of the animal-sport complex. Conceptualising the breadth of modes of animal insertion encourages differentiation and, as components of a larger complex, is important in highlighting how animals occupy numerous and often-contradictory roles. Indeed, it may even be to the point where *multispecies* sport is pleonastic. By returning to the study of core sociological problems including social action, social order, and social change we will necessarily engage with the fact that we and our research are, and must be, more-than-human.

## FIVE KEY READINGS

1. **Arluke, A. & Sanders, C.R. (1996). *Regarding Animals.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press**

Drawing on the ethnographic research activities of the two authors, this book outlines fundamental research questions and ethnographic research activities that all those seeking to study animals in and through sport should be familiar with.

2. **Haraway, D.J. (2003). The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press**.

An agenda-setting text that defines scholarship attending to animals as companion species.

3. **Elias, N. (2008[1986]). An essay on sport and violence. In: Elias N and Dunning E *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process*, Revised Edition. Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 150–73**.

More widely known in the sociology of human sport than multispecies sport, this classic text demonstrates the possibilities and pitfalls of studying animal sport as a sociological problem.

4. **Geertz, C. (1972). Deep play: Notes on the Balinese cockfight. *Daedalus*, 101(1): 1-37**

A classic study that demonstrates both the power of thick description to study social practices and the need to study the place and use of animals as a way of understanding social organisation.

5. **Gillet, J. & Gilbert, M. (2014) *Sport, animals, and society* London: Routledge**

This edited collection is the landmark text for the contemporary study of human-animal interactions in and through sport and leisure. A range of empirical practices, methodological approaches, and theoretical perspectives are presented throughout.

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