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NARRATIVE AND MULTISPECIES COMMUNICATION

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VIEWS FROM THE SADDLE: EMPATHY AND ROMANTICIZATION IN ORAL
NARRATIVE AND MULTISPECIES COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

In the summer of 2023, I traveled to Wyoming to conduct fieldwork while working on a dude ranch as a wrangler. The research I conducted had two particular focuses: the learned narratives that wranglers shared with guests while on the trail, and multispecies communication between humans and horses. These two aspects rest on a common thread of empathy and romanticization, while separately being framed by theoretical concepts such as ideology, anthropocentrism, sanitization, performance, and register. The overall experience given to the guests presented a sanitized idea of the American West and its history, and human-horse communication. This sanitization leads to a romanticized view of these experiences, glossing over the true complexities that surround the area and multispecies communication.

The concept of empathy comes up when examining language used by the wranglers and multispecies communication. Language can be used to promote social bonds, which in turn can generate feelings of empathy amongst users. Further, the basis of human-horse communication rests on trust, and with that comes the ability to empathize across species. Various examples demonstrate the true complexities involved with multispecies communication and illustrate the depth of the relationship between a horse and its rider. This point, used in conjunction with other examples and frameworks, is used to combat anthropocentric ideas, and expand ideologies regarding language.

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PREFACE

Tuesday, July 11th, 2023

As soon as the last ride of the afternoon gets back to the corral, I work quickly with the other wranglers to untack the horses, taking the large Western or endurance saddles off along with the sweaty saddle pads. It has been a long, hot day of riding, and the sun is beating down on us while we ensure that all the horses are taken care of. After all horses have been untacked, we untie them from the posts and take their halters off. One wrangler, usually Emma, takes a four-wheeler up to the Bench to check to make sure the gates are set correctly. The Bench sits at the top of a long hill- it is a large, grassy area divided into three paddocks: Upper, Middle, and Lower Bench. These names were chosen based on their location to the East Fork River which flows through the Ranch. Upper Bench is closest to the Absaroka Mountains and the Shoshone National Forest, while Lower Bench borders the Wind River Reservation and is closest to the Wind River Mountains. The area is an old airplane runway that was retired due to the severe crosswinds that made landing difficult. According to Rob, the lead wrangler, Benton, the founder of the Ranch, had crashed his plane there twice and survived, adding to the lore surrounding the man and the area. Also at the top of the hill is an area called Sacrifice which you have to go through to get to Middle and Upper Bench. The old airplane hangar is here, and it is called Sacrifice because nothing grows there. After the last ride of the day, the wranglers send the horses up to one of the areas on the Bench where they rotationally graze to prevent any one area from getting too worn down. The herd spends two hours in one of the large pastures before two wranglers switch them to the all-dirt Sacrifice for the night, where the maintenance crew lays hay out.

As we wait for Emma to finish setting the gates so that the horses can run up, Elle (one of the owners of the Ranch) and Rob take a seat on the wooden bench by the feed shed- they will watch the herd run up and check to see if any appear to be lame, injured, or sick. I take a position by the wooden gate leading from the tacking corral to the gravel road, while Alex takes a spot at the green gate between the tacking corral and the corral where all of the other horses are. Horses are lined up at the gate, they know what time it is. Two Belgian-breed mares, Aurora and Celeste, stand at the front, their big bodies blocking other horses from getting the prime spot. We see Emma come down the hill on the four-wheeler, a sign that the gates are set. Her red, curly hair flies behind her as she speeds down the hill, taking turns quickly for the adrenaline rush. We wait for her, she needs to be out of the way before we open the gates. She gets down the hill and parks the four-wheeler by Elle and Rob. We double-check that everyone is out of the horse corral before Alex and I call to each other:

“Ready, Alex?” I call as I unlock the gate.

“Ready!” she answers.

This moment is crucial- we have to open the gates at the same time. If we fail to do this, the horses could become panicked, someone (horse or human) could get hurt, and it would cause chaos.

We fling the gates open, the timing a success. It’s important to open the gates all of the way to prevent accidents, so I drag the wooden gate over until it touches the fence it hinges upon, thankful that I did not get a splinter from the wooden gate this time. I jog to the right side of the gate, adrenaline slightly pulsing. Right as I cross out of the herd’s path, 140 horses come thundering past me.

Chestnuts, bays, grays, paints, palominos, duns, and pintos come thundering past, kicking up gravel, and dirt. My nostrils and eyes become filled with flying dust, and some of it sticks to my sweaty hair. The dust of early July is a drastic change from the muddy June, and despite the dust going everywhere I am grateful we are out of the mud season. Horse hooves strike the ground, the wind rushing through their manes and tails, blowing my hair back. The leaders, usually the big draft horses, gallop away from the corral and up the hill, the others following behind them. They race to the Bench, running past us with their friends. They know the way, not veering off the path, and that grass awaits them at the top. Some of the herd runs up slower than others, choosing to walk or trot. Some, especially the ones that were ridden this afternoon and were in the tacking-up corral, watch the others run past, waiting for their friends. As soon as they spot them, they join the rest of the herd running up the hill.

A group of horses stay in the corral, sectioned off from the others in an area known as the Back 40. They watch, pressed up against the fence, some whinnying and calling to their friends. Most of these are what we call 'Founders', horses that are easily susceptible to founder, an equine disease like diabetes. The Founders will get to go up in two hours to the Sacrifice area, as grass is too sugary for them to eat. This is also where we may keep horses that are too injured to go up top, and they will stay down in the corral tonight.

As the last of the non-Founder horses race up to the top, Hope hops onto the four-wheeler that Emma had been on. She starts it up and begins to follow behind the last horses as they wind up the hill to Upper Bench. Hope and I are responsible for following the horses up tonight, as well as switching them at the two-hour mark when we will also run the Founder horses up. Alex closes the gate she had opened and Katie releases the Founders from the Back 40 into the main part of the corral. Up on the Bench, Hope closes the gate from Upper Bench to Sacrifice as the

last of the non-Founder horses run into the pasture. I wait for Hope to drive back down the hill, holding both of our water bottles so that we can walk into the Lodge together before dinner. It is around 6:00 p.m., so we will switch them around 8.

Luckily, we get a chance to get our dinner and eat a little bit of it before we have to head out. Hope and I exit the Lodge and head to the corral, Hope hopping onto the orange four-wheeler. I head to the green gate where the Founders wait to be let up to Sacrifice, opening it as they all run past me. Leading the way is Geronimo, a paint quarter horse, and Dandy, a bay quarter horse gelding flecked with aging gray hairs who is one of the sweetest horses in the corral. The five Shetland pony mares take up the rear- Story, a gray pony, Roanie, a red roan, and Tiffany, Echo, and Winning Tears all orangey-palomino. I jog and hop onto a green four-wheeler, following closely behind the ponies, and Hope follows right behind me. We urge the slow ponies up to the top, the sky growing darker as a summer storm rolls in while the sun sets. Once they (finally) enter the Sacrifice area, Hope shuts the gate while I race through the dirt to get to the far gate leading to Upper Bench. I park my four-wheeler so it is out of the way of the gate before hopping off and opening the gate. In the past, switching the horses over has been challenging and time-consuming with the horses not wanting to leave the lush, green grass. Often, the wranglers have to chase them down on the four-wheelers and herd them in, a process that can take over half an hour at times. Hope parks her four-wheeler behind mine and waits to go in.

“Come on!” I call out in the loudest voice I can muster.

Some horses will file in without the need to herd them, and some of the Arabians begin to file into Sacrifice at a walk. I call out again, and I notice that all of the horses have begun to come forward to the gate, even from the farthest reaches of the pasture. A light drizzle begins to

come down, and I am grateful I brought my jacket as the gray clouds fill the sky. The clouds loom over the background of the Absaroka mountains, painting them in a shadowed light as snow begins to accumulate at the tops of them. Mares, geldings, and yearlings, drafts and Arabians, quarter horses, and mustangs all calmly come forward, passing through the green gate from Upper into Sacrifice.

“Come on!” I call for a third time, just as loudly as the first. The herd continues to file in and I turn to Hope who is staring in disbelief that they are all coming through the gate. I begin to laugh, not believing what I am seeing. 140 horses file in at a walk, something that they have not done this entire summer. A few stragglers remain in Upper and I call out for a final time. Like magic, they come through the gate into Sacrifice. At this point, Hope and I are uncontrollably laughing, not believing what had just happened. After having to chase them down all of the previous times, the ease of what had just happened seemed impossible. Hope races on her four-wheeler through Upper, double-checking that none of the herd has been left in the pasture. My hair is plastered to my head from the rain as she comes through the gate, nodding that all of the horses are now in Sacrifice. I shut the gate and jump onto my four-wheeler as we race through the dirt and down the hill, laughing the entire way. This was my last time switching the herd, I would be leaving the Ranch in a few days, and what a way to go.

“You’re a horse whisperer!” Hope shouts, and I laugh.

We make it back to the barn where we park the four-wheelers, sprinting back into the Lodge to tell everyone what had just happened, right as the sky opens up and begins to pour.

1. UP TO MY KNEES IN MUD

During the summer of 2023, I spent two months in rural Wyoming employed as a wrangler on a 650-acre working dude ranch. The working part of the ranch has to do with the Highland and Black Angus cattle operation that bred and raised the cattle for meat consumption. The other part of the business, the dude ranch, dealt with guests. The paying guests stayed in cabins on the property, would have all meals cooked for them by the head chef and his assistants, and would go out on horseback trail rides twice a day. It was the wrangler's job to lead these rides, to learn the trails and the stories associated with them, to tack up and untack the horses that the guests would be riding, feed and care for the horses, train the younger horses, and start the colts and fillies that had never been ridden before, and help to ensure a positive guest experience.

I worked with a team of about seven wranglers: all but one were women, and all but two were new to the Ranch. Rob, the lead wrangler, was the only male wrangler, and he and Rachel had worked at the Ranch for multiple summers. The employees at the Ranch, including those in housekeeping and maintenance, represented a variety of states and countries. Four wranglers were from the Northeast United States, one from Southern California, one from New Zealand, one from Kansas, and myself from Missouri. Other employees were from the Netherlands, England, Belgium, Texas, Pennsylvania, and more. All participants are represented by pseudonyms to protect their identities, and informed consent was obtained.

In conducting research for this project, I gathered data through ethnographic field methods such as participant observation and informal interviews and recorded these with handwritten field notes and audio recordings. Given the setting, I also utilized aspects of the Rubber Boots Method, as used in Cypher (2022) with the application to horseback riding and cattle ranching. In this context, riding horses, the anthropologist acts as both experiencer and

observer that is “not just... ‘about’ but also ‘with’” (Cypher 2022, 242). In my fieldwork, this was accomplished by gathering information that was accessible only on horseback- focusing on places stories that are only able to be reached via horse, and analyzing multispecies communication between horse and rider. The Rubber Boots Method does not ignore human entities but rather incorporates humans into the examination of the complexities and entanglements of other entities, such as in regards to multispecies communication.

In writing, I took a similar approach by utilizing the perspective of being on horseback to illustrate my ideas and analyses. Further, I also apply Geertz’s concept of thick description (Geertz 1973). I apply this by not only depicting what was gathered through my observations, but by providing analysis of not only these observations but symbolic analysis as well, such as contexts, meanings, and consequences.

My ethnographic research is divided into two parts: oral narratives and multispecies communication. The first section explores oral narrative tradition and performance based on the stories that the wranglers shared with the guests. Of all the stories shared, part one features two: Crowheart and Old Lady’s. The Crowheart story is the most in-depth, going over the history of Chief Washakie and the Shoshone tribe. I go on to explain how this story is representative of the sanitized version of the American West that guests are given, and how this leads to a romanticization of the American West and Native American tribes, which can lead to erasure. This sanitization refers to the changing narratives to make them more easily digestible to listeners, often by removing difficult histories or situations, or controversial topics. Romanticization refers to the description or idea of an entity in a way that depicts it as more positive than reality. This theme of sanitization is continued throughout the first section, going

into the differences in the guest experience versus the worker experience, and how this perpetuates the romanticization of the West. Featuring scholars such as Paul Grice, Asif Agha, and Richard Bauman, part one also goes into concepts of performance, register, and socialization by delving into the underlying descriptions and meanings of the oral narratives, and touches on how language is used to form relationships.

Part two continues with this description of language, fully delving into equine-human communication and its complexities. Delving into concepts such as ideology, scholars like Alessandro Duranti and Jan Hauck are brought into the discussion of multispecies communication as a language. This section describes situations where this multispecies communication went wrong, where I learned more about this communication, and when communication was crucial between horse and rider. This section continues with the theme of empathy and challenges anthropocentrism and the concept of being human by supporting findings from scholars such as Eduardo Kohn and contrasting with René Descartes. This section brings in ethnographic data from outside of my time in Wyoming, adding in data from time spent in the saddle in Oklahoma. While this ethnography is a product of all of my years of study, research, and ethnographic fieldwork in Wyoming, the second part is also a product of all 19 years that I have spent in a saddle.

Multiple themes echo throughout the two parts. The first is empathy, a concept this ethnography introduces through Bronislaw Malinowski's concept of phatic communion and traces through how language forged social bonds between the wranglers and between the horse and rider. The second concept is romanticization, which is introduced when discussing how the stories the guests are told are sanitized and lead to a romantic view of the American West and its people. These stories gloss over the hardships that those in the past and present have had to face

to live, work, and survive in the American West. This theme continues into the second section where the complexities of multispecies communication are often glossed over in research and in real life. While the guests were told how to ride the horse, true communication comes from experience, a particular mindset, and understanding. This communication was simplified for the guests, and while not an inherently bad thing, leads to a glossed-over view of multispecies communication.

PART ONE: ORAL NARRATIVE

2. BEHIND THE BENCH



Image 1. Crowheart Butte, located on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. Photo by Madeline Lee

I tie my hair back into a low ponytail, fitting my black English riding helmet over my head. My hands could hardly move fast enough, I was so excited. This afternoon I would be leading a staff ride, an opportunity given to other members of the staff- housekeeping, maintenance, kitchen- when they would get a chance to ride without any guests. This was a rare occurrence, as a majority of the staff had only had this opportunity once so far this summer. The staff had been split into two groups based on ability, and I would be leading the faster group on a ride that would allow them to canter while also riding my favorite horse, Tundra. The trail I chose to take them on is a route known as Behind The Bench, a trail that takes you up the very same hill that the horses run up each night, through Lower Bench, and onto the Wind River Reservation. This was the first trail I went on at the Ranch, and it would also be the last trail I

would go on during my time here. The first time was during my first week at the Ranch when guests would not appear for another week, and Rob led Ava and me while we rode Aurora and Celeste, the matching Belgian mare pair.

Aurora was going on the ride today as well, but one of the maintenance staff, Ivan, was riding her. Alan, the head of maintenance, was riding Bea, a black draft mare, and two girls from housekeeping rode Pasquanelle, a Mustang gelding, and Sparrow, a small bay gelding who hated other horses. He would kick out at horses behind him or bite ones that were in front, but he was very sweet to humans. Ava was following the ride on Medora as the back wrangler, and I made sure to tell the girl on Sparrow to go right in front of her so that he was away from other horses- “He loves people, just not other horses!”

As the last of my group mounts their horses, I lead Tundra to the mounting blocks, tying the lead rope around his big neck. I put my left foot into the stirrup and swung myself into the leather endurance saddle I had grown accustomed to using. At only five years old, Tundra is tall and incredibly muscular. At his wither, the spot on the base of his mane where horses are measured from, he stands taller than my 5’6” body, his black feathered hooves bigger than my spread-out hand.

“Alrighty, guys,” I tell the group, “I’m going to have you all follow me as we head out this way!”

I steer Tundra to the right of the mounting blocks, moving past the tacking-up corral and heading up the path that the horses run up each night towards the Bench. One thing I find difficult is navigating away from my regular customer-service voice and mannerisms that I use with guests since these are my friends and coworkers. The group follows behind me as we head up the hill, and I make sure to tell them to stand up out of the saddle, or two-point as it is also

known, as we go up the hill. This takes their weight off of the horse's back, helping the horse to get up the hill, as well as to prevent injuries and back soreness. All of these riders know this and have ridden before, but we wranglers always make sure to emphasize the importance of doing this.

I twist in the saddle so that I am completely looking behind me, facing Tundra's tail, to check to make sure all of the pairs are making it steadily up the long climb. Alan and Bea are slowly climbing, with Sparrow and Medora just behind them. Autumn keeps halting Sparrow to make sure he stays behind Bea, but Medora is moving slow enough that there is no worry of her overtaking the two pairs.

"I know it's a long time to two-point, all, but I believe in all of you!" I call, understanding the toll the position takes on a rider's legs and lower back. "You're doing great!"

I notice Aurora moving quickly at the walk, coming up onto Tundra's hindquarters. Ivan is pulling on the reins, trying to get the big mare to slow down, but his efforts are fruitless. I cluck to Tundra, squeezing my heels, and lightly tap him with the crop I'm carrying to try to get him to move out a bit more so that Ivan does not have to work so hard. Aurora continues to push the pace, and I begin to use my steering as a defensive maneuver to keep her behind us, moving Tundra in a serpentine so her path is blocked. This is successful, and Ivan's arms are able to take a break from pulling so much.

We eventually make it to the top of the hill, and I hop off Tundra to open the green gate into Lower Bench, my knees jolting slightly with the impact. Ava dismounts Medora as well, and we check each horse's cinch to make sure it is tight. A loose cinch means the saddle could slip, something that is not only risky for the rider but the horse as well, especially if it slips completely to one side. I shut the opened gate, check my own horse's cinch, and call out to the

group to watch what I am about to do. This trick is something I am very proud of, and it took me most of the summer to develop. Ground mounting is a technique where one mounts a horse without the aid of a mounting block, getting a leg up, or other interference. The bigger the horse, the more difficult ground mounting is, but the technique is a crucial skill for us wranglers who don't get to decide which horse we ride. I bring my left knee up as high as it can go, hopping slightly with my right foot to get my left into the stirrup. Holding onto the pommel of the saddle, I give another hop and swing my way from the ground onto Tundra's back, patting him on the neck for a job well done standing still. One of my friends gives a light clap and I laugh as we resume the ride, cutting across Lower Bench.

Twisting around again, I ask: "Is everyone feeling good for a little trot?" The four staff members nod and I turn back to face the front. I cluck and squeeze my heels, Tundra changing gaits into a trot. All of a sudden, from directly behind me, Aurora rushes by at a fast canter. She refuses to listen to Ivan's desperate 'woahs' or his pulling back on the reins as tight as they can go. She circles back, headed for the gate we had come through. I raise my right hand, a signal for slowing down, and bring the rest of the group to a halt.

"Sit down, Ivan!" I yell at him, trying to stay calm and gain control of the out-of-control situation. "Sit down and pull back!"

My instincts are telling me that he is about to fall, and I order the rest of the group to stay put with Ava while I canter Tundra across the bench after the runaway pair. Miraculously, Aurora comes to a walk right by the gate with Ivan still atop, but I can tell he still does not have control.

"I'm trying to stop her.." he calls to me as I reach them.

"It's okay!" I say in an attempt to reassure him. In a situation like this, it is incredibly important for the rider to stay calm.

I move Tundra to Aurora's side, asking if Ivan is okay which he affirms. I attempt to bring Aurora back to the group, but right as we reach the others she bolts off again, the same as before. She refuses to listen to Ivan, who is doing all of the correct signals, and canters off until she reaches the gate. After a tough conversation with Ivan, I decided, as the lead wrangler, to send him back to the barn with Ava. To no fault of his own, he was not in control. Aurora was refusing to listen to any of the attempts to communicate- following the lead horse and staying in line, contact with the reins, or voice commands- and the situation had become unsafe.

When communication between a horse and rider is unsuccessful, the pair is unable to be successful and safety could become compromised. This could be the safety of the rider if they were to fall or suffer emotional distress, the safety of the horse since they could get themselves into a dangerous situation since they are uncontrollable, or the safety of other group members whose horses could get spooked or where an accident between the uncontrollable horse and a group member could be caused. Communication can fail in multiple ways, and this instance displayed a failure of the horse to listen.

To Ivan's credit, he was very understanding of the situation and dismounted Aurora as Ava dismounted Medora. They went through the gate, down the hill, and back to the barn. I urged Tundra to rejoin the rest of the group, feeling guilty at having to send Ivan back when I knew he was so excited for this ride. The rest of the group was understanding as well, and we walked through a portion of the Lower Bench.

"How do we feel about trotting through the rest of the Bench?" I turn and ask the group now that the energy has calmed down.

"Sounds good!" One of the girls answered, and the other two nodded in agreement. I clucked Tundra forward to a trot, and as I posted I kept turning to check on the group behind me,

grateful that I was able to trust Tundra to do that. I had led rides without a back wrangler before, but it was not always an ideal situation since they typically assisted in letting the lead wrangler know what was going on with the rest of the group.

The four of us carved a pathway through Lower Bench, posting up and down to the rhythm of our horse's trots. The sun was shining down as we pointed ourselves in the direction of the Wind River Mountain Range, white puffy clouds dotting the sky. The green grass swirled around the horse's hooves, becoming treaded down behind us. Soon, we reached a gate made with four wooden posts and wire, an opening through the electric, barbed wire fence that surrounded the entirety of the Bench. I raise my right arm at a 90-degree angle, holding my hand stretched out, and slow Tundra to a walk. The rest of the group does the same and I dismount, taking the last few steps on the dusty ground before I can open the gate. I pull the wire gate to the side and bring my right arm behind me. My reins are looped around this arm, and when Tundra feels the pressure he comes through the gate to stand by me, out of the way so the others can get through. Once Sparrow makes his way through the gate I shut it tightly, put the leather reins over Tundra's head, and swing onto his back from the ground.

The moment our feet passed through the gate, we left the Bench and entered the Wind River Reservation, home to the Shoshone-Arapaho tribes. When Rob first showed me this trail, he explained how the Shoshone and Arapaho tribes did not get along, a situation that led to a lot of difficulties on the shared reservation. I explain to the current group the history that was explained to me: that the Federal Government had asked the Shoshone if the Arapaho tribe could stay on their reservation land for the winter, as it was too snowy and cold to continue to the reservation that the government had said they had laid aside for the Arapaho. Reluctantly, the Shoshone agreed but told the Arapaho that if they were still there after the winter, the Shoshone

Chief, Chief Washakie, would come in with a war party and kill them all. Sure enough, Rob would say, spring came around and the Arapaho were still there, the federal government had not set aside a separate reservation for them. Chief Washakie realized, however, that a majority of the Arapaho that were there were women and children, and coming in with a war party would mean the slaughter of innocents. The Shoshone Chief allowed the Arapaho to stay on their reservation, and the Wind River Reservation became home to both tribes.

There are a few other stories Rob has told me about Chief Washakie, and I will share some of those later on the trail. For now, we continue, making a sharp left after the gate and continuing the trail on the reservation as it leads up a rocky hill. Once the group is organized behind me on the uphill, I call out that we are going to canter and that the riders should remember to rise out of the saddle. Squeezing my heels, I trot Tundra a few steps before going into my two-point position and asking for the canter. He is more 'slow' than 'go', and I have to squeeze my heels and use my crop to get him to move up to the faster, three-beat gait. The three other riders canter behind me and we rush up the first section of uphill, gravel and dirt kicking up behind us. We rushed past a cluster of trees where, a few weeks ago, I saw an elk lying down, the closest I had ever been to one of the large animals. This is also where I used to see one of the wild horses, a chestnut stallion with white socks, but I did not see him today. Perhaps he moved to a higher altitude to get away from the heat. I can tell Tundra wants to break to a trot, but I keep consistent pressure to dissuade him from doing so. We maintain the gait, flying up the reservation, and my legs become sore from keeping Tundra in this faster gait, but they are granted relief when I raise my hand as we crest this part of the uphill, slowing the group to a walk to travel downhill. I give Tundra another pat on his large neck for his effort, loving every moment that I get to ride him.

“Madeline,” Alan calls out in a playful tone from two horses behind me. “Are you familiar with the Crowheart story?”

Alan, having been at the Ranch for three years, knows that this is the location where the wranglers usually share this story.

“Why yes, Alan, I do,” I reply.

Tundra begins to climb the next uphill and I rise out of the saddle, once again twisting around so that the group can hear the story. I learned the Crowheart story from Rob and Hannah, Hannah being one of the Ranch owners, and they taught the other wranglers as well. Projecting my voice, I begin to share the story with the group behind me.

“About 40 minutes away from the Ranch is a formation called Crowheart Butte, which sits in the town of Crowheart. If you have ever seen it, it looks like a place where a dramatic battle movie scene would take place. Many years ago, the Crow and the Shoshone had been at war. Chief Washakie, the Chief of the Shoshones, was a very wise chief. He was Chief for over 80 years, which, if you know anything about tribal politics, you know is very rare. He foresaw that the two tribes would just end up killing each other if the fighting continued, so he challenged the Crow Chief to a duel on top of this butte. Many people thought that the Crow Chief would win, he was older and proven in many battles, but Chief Washakie ended up winning. Chief Washakie had so much respect for the Crow Chief, however, that after beating him, he cut open the chest of the Crow Chief and ate his heart, hence the name Crowheart Butte.

Many years later, someone asked Chief Washakie if he had really eaten the heart of the Chief. He answered: ‘When we are young, sometimes we do things that are silly’.”

As I finish telling the story, we reach a red gate that leads from the Reservation onto Wyoming Fish & Game land. The idea of the chronotope involves the literary combination of temporal markers and spatial indicators into one, which means that time becomes a visible entity and space becomes an entity of movement (Bakhtin 1981). I believe this concept can be applied here with the red gate, which serves as both a spatial and temporal indicator of the length of the trail, serving as a marker for how far the ride has come, how long they have left, and on what land the ride is currently on. The gate also exists in the past by being involved with the Crowheart story, marking this space as fluid within time.

I dismount Tundra, gravel crunching underneath my feet, and unwrap the metal chain from around the weathered red fence. It creaks loudly as it opens and closes, and I wrap the chain link back around the fence line.

“I’ve been reading [Chief Washakie’s] biography,” Alan says as the group gets organized, “and the story in that is different. There are many different versions of the story.”

He is correct, and even the wooden sign that sits on the highway across from Crowheart Butte tells a different story. The sign reads:

“In March 1866, a battle was fought in this vicinity between Shoshone and Bannock Indians on one side and Crow Indians on the other.

The contest was waged for the supremacy of hunting grounds in the Wind River basin. Crowheart Butte was so named because the victorious Washakie, Chief of the Shoshones displayed a Crow Indian’s heart on his lance at the war dance after the battle. The major portion of the battle was fought near Black Mountain several miles to the north.

Washakie, in his youth and middle age, was a very mighty warrior. He was a wise chief and friendly to the white people. No white man’s scalp hung in this chief’s teepee.”

Rob had emphasized how intelligent Chief Washakie was, and how he had known that befriending the white men would lead to greater benefit for his tribe. According to Rob, this was how he had negotiated such a large reservation for the Shoshone that, according to rumor, was larger than the territory the Shoshones held before.

Behind me, Alan discusses another version of the story he had heard, but the distance and wind blowing through my ears means I am unable to hear him. As we crest the hill shortly after the red gate we meet a downhill section that curves up to the last uphill of the ride, the top of which is the location of one of the best lookout spots on the Ranch.

“Alright, guys,” I called out behind me. “This is the last canter spot of the trail. Once it flattens out we will pick up a trot, then canter up the hill to the lookout spot! Sound good?”

The group nods as we walk down the hill. As we get closer to the flat part I feel Tundra tense up beneath me, moving forward with more energy than he had the entire ride so far. His ears are pricked forward and he stares straight ahead, picking up his hooves with gusto. I check behind me to make sure the group is close enough together before loosening up on the reins. Tundra needs no urging from my other aids to pick up the trot, and as the trail trends upwards I lean forward in the saddle and squeeze my legs. Tundra charges forward into the canter, moving faster than I have ever gone on him before. His black mane flies back towards my face as he canters up the hill. I look behind me and see the rest of the group cantering along, the second rider in line slightly further back. Pasquanelle, a smaller horse than Tundra, can’t match his pace. I turn to face forward, laughing at how fun this moment is.

“Go Tundra, go!” I exclaim.

He races the wind, aiming for the crest of the hill. We reach the top and I raise my right arm, slowing both myself and the rest of the group. I lean down and wrap my arms around Tundra's neck, giving him a huge pat. "Good boy!"

The group comes to a halt and we stand atop the ridgeline, looking out at the green and brown Absaroka mountains. You can see for miles from this spot. I look around, eyes peeled for wild horses, Rocky Mountain elk, or Pronghorn antelope, as I take in the view one last time.

In storytelling, the wranglers engage in the performance of narratives that seek to deepen the guest's understanding of the histories of the land and its people. The narrative event, which the wrangler tells to the guests on the trail, is linked with the narrated event, the story or event itself that is being presented. Storytelling is considered oral performance, with "its form, meaning, and functions rooted in culturally defined scenes or events" in order to "constitute meaningful contexts for action, interpretation, and evaluation" (Bauman 1986, 2). In Wyoming, the oral performance of stories served to present listeners with the history of a specific location, such as an old outlaw hideout, or a specific event, such as the Crowheart story, which aimed to provide more meaning to the guest's experience and present them with verbal imagery that would provoke them to interpret what life had been like in that space many years ago. The interpretation that the oral performance spurred, however, caused guests to have a romanticized and simplified view of the American West, the land surrounding the Ranch, and the histories of its people.

When I got back to Oklahoma I set out to learn more about the histories that the wrangler's stories don't share. The stories of Chief Washakie lead to twisted interpretations that

continue to sell a simplified, flattened version of the American West that romanticizes and erases the histories of Indigenous peoples. To clarify, when discussing erasure throughout this project, I am referring to the removal of peoples, their histories, contributions, stories, and cultures in oral narratives, discussions, and presentations about the American West.

The narratives that the guests are told boast about the size of the Wind River Reservation, attributing Chief Washakie's intelligence and relationship with the United States Government to his ability to negotiate a reservation that was larger than the territory the Shoshone previously held. First, this perpetuates the idea that intelligence and getting along with white people go hand-in-hand, an idea that perpetuates a sort of white-savior mentality. Secondly, the Wind River Reservation was not reserved for only the Shoshone tribe as some might believe. Not only did the Shoshone have to share their land with the Arapaho, but after only about fifteen-to-twenty years after the establishment of the Reservation in 1868, "the reservation became a vast holding area for tremendous herds of white-owned cattle" (Stamm 1999, xv). These cattle took space away from Shoshone-owned cattle, shrinking the size of the area where the Shoshone could build homes, businesses, or farms.

The Wind River Reservation also aided in the spread of disease through poor sanitary conditions and confinement to the Reservation, along with contact with White settlers. Diseases included influenza, diphtheria, and measles. Coupled with malnutrition, the Shoshone-Arapaho of the Wind River Reservation lost "10.8 percent of the total population" in a span of 15 years (Stamm 1999, 238). Native children were also forced to attend the Wind River Boarding school which Washakie himself endorsed by having his own children attend (Stamm 1999, 228). The school aimed to separate the students from their indigenous identities, using numerous tactics

such as using English only, punishing the use of other languages, and forcing boys to cut their hair.

What this shows is that, despite the warmth that the wranglers emphasized between Chief Washakie and the United States Government, the Shoshone-Arapaho peoples still suffered at the hands of the Government and white settlers. They were subject to atrocities: cultural genocide, loss of ceremonial lands, disease, poverty, and hunger. The stories that the guests are told of the Shoshone people erase the atrocities that the tribe was subjected to and falsely romanticizes Shoshone history and the relationship the tribe had with white individuals.

Also not discussed in the stories of the Wind River Reservation is the history of uranium milling that continues to affect the area today. The Wind River Reservation is the site of the Chemtrade Logistics sulfuric acid factory and the Susquehanna-Western uranium mill, two entities that have polluted the environment with sulfuric acid, uranium, and other radioactive materials. Sulfuric acid is not only produced by Chemtrade but is also used in the process of uranium extraction to break down the raw ore and remove the uranium. As a result of this process and its production, sulfuric acid contaminates the soil and groundwater in the area (Weil 2012). The contamination of uranium and other radioactive materials is attributed to the uranium mill. When the mill was abandoned in the early 1960s, large piles of waste were left behind. The “massive piles of contaminated materials... sat uncapped and unlined... until they were removed in the late 1980s in an uncontrolled manner” (Ahtone 2012). These tailings were moved 60 miles away after a 1988 study from the Department of Energy found uranium, radium, and thorium contamination in the soil, surface water, and shallow groundwater. The DOE then left after the materials were moved, saying that their “job was done and that the site would clean itself up naturally” (Ahtone 2012). Over twenty years later, flooding on the Wind River Reservation in

2010 found uranium contamination spikes “as high as 100 times the maximum contaminant levels set by law” (Ahtone 2012), including the maximum level for the Safe Drinking Water Act.

This contamination has led to devastating consequences for the Shoshone-Arapaho tribes. One such consequence are the health effects that are brought on by this contamination. Preliminary results of a 2013 study by the Wind River Environmental Health Initiative found that “nearly four out of 10 Wind River Indian Reservation residents report that a blood relative has died of cancer” and that the reservation has a higher cancer rate than the national average (Feemster 2013).

It is important to recognize the complexities of these issues. While the environment of the Wind River Reservation has been exploited for its resources, those who live there may be divided in their viewpoints. For example, while the history of uranium milling has led to dire health consequences for the Shoshone, the mill also provided jobs for those who live there. Few sources provide information on the uranium milling that occurred, and many of them are over ten years old. To fully examine the complex viewpoints of these issues, more community-engaged research needs to be done to study the current situation and the opinions of these events from those who live there.

The erasure of Indigenous histories in the oral narratives presented leads to a false understanding of the American West. It leads to mythologized narratives that can potentially damage the reputations, ideas, and contributions of individuals, like Chief Washakie; it simplifies and glosses over the tenacity and grit that the American West requires for survival; and erases the misuse and mistreatment of Indigenous lands which perpetuates a cycle of harm that individuals face, such as the radioactive contamination and its health consequences, and the domination of

White-owned cattle that take space away from Shoshone-Arapaho-owned cattle. With the cycle of harm on the Wind River Reservation, this erasure then prevents the possibility of change. If people don't know about these issues, they cannot act to change or raise awareness about them, which allows the harm to continue. These stories also add to beliefs that guests may already have about the area and its people, beliefs that may also be romanticized through images and videos seen on social media, television shows, books, or stories they have heard from others. While not every guest has these beliefs, the stories reinforce these ideas that they may or may not already have, allowing for the continued trend of erasure and mythologization.

3. OLD LADY'S



Image 2. The Old Lady's Cabin, a homestead cabin built in the late 1800s to early 1900s. Photo by Madeline Lee

The use of oral narrative performance in perpetuating a romanticized and simplified idea also occurs in a story associated with the trail known as Old Lady's. The focus of the ride sits at

about the halfway mark of the trail, nested in an aspen grove. I call out to the guests to pause when we reach it, indicating that they should all face in the direction that I am pointing, which is in front of me. The guests gather next to me, facing the same direction. The wind whistles through the leaves, blowing my horse's mane up towards me. The smell of dust mixes with the earthy, woody scent of the surrounding forest. The smell of sagebrush is not far off, reminiscent of the earlier parts of the trail that led us through the sage. In front of me sits an old wooden cabin, about seven logs high. Peering through the green leaves and the purple lupine plants, you can see the outline of a doorway and four sturdy sides that have stood the test of time. Trees, bushes, and other vegetation grow all around the cabin as well as inside, fully visible due to the lack of a roof. Like the red gate, the old homestead cabin serves as both a spatial and temporal indicator. It indicates where on the trail the ride is physically and temporally, and in this case, marks the last fourth of the ride. Further, the cabin also represents a space that is fluid within time, having been built in the late 1800s, and existing in both the past and present.

As the guests look out at the structure, Hope, the back wrangler for the ride that day, begins the story:

“This cabin was built in the late 1800s by a woman named Mrs. Parr. She was a homesteader and lived out here by herself along with her sheep, who stayed in the barn next to the cabin. She only went into town once a year. Her nearest neighbor was five miles away named Dirty Larry, and there was a rumor that the two of them had been seeing each other. She spent somewhere between seven and nine summers and winters here before she eventually left and moved to Casper, Wyoming, where she got the nickname ‘Sheep Queen of Wyoming’.

One time a guest asked why she took the name Mrs if we have no record of her having a husband. This was a protective measure used by many single women in the West. Out of all the homestead cabins in the area, this is the only one still in fairly good condition.”

The guests listen to the story Hope tells. Some take pictures of the old cabin with their cameras or phones, the technology juxtaposing the 100-year-old structure. The narrative presented paints the story of an independent, reclusive woman who went against the societal norms of the time. The performance may cause the listener to evaluate Mrs. Parr as being promiscuous for having relations with her neighbor, or that the listener believes that they too would be able to survive by themselves out in the Wyoming backcountry. The story reinforces the romantic image of the American West and fails to recognize the tenacity and grit that living and ranching in the area required. The winters would have been brutal and the isolation would make it difficult to get necessary supplies. Furthermore, war broke out between cattle ranchers and sheep farmers which plagued Wyoming. The battles between the cattle and sheep ranchers led to the deaths of sixteen people and 10,000 sheep (Clayton 2014). By omitting the hardships that homesteaders faced during the time, the guests are presented with a romanticized, glossed-over image of life in the American West which disguises the complexities and difficulties of life during that time.

The oral narratives presented by the wranglers recall the history of the area and its people. These narratives are aimed to enhance the experience of the guests by filling in the silence on long rides and adding information to structures and landmarks encountered on the trail. These narratives are different from the oral narrative tradition of Indigenous tribes, though,

in many ways. In many Native communities, stories are not just shared for entertainment purposes. Instead, there is “an action-oriented emphasis on using these narratives for moral instruction, healing, and developing culturally relevant tribal and social identities” (Kroskrity 2012, 4). For example, Western Apache storytellers utilize place-names to prompt their listeners to imagine the location. This can be used to do something known as “stalking with stories”, where the place and the story associated with it can have a “sizable psychological impact... on the persons to whom they are presented” (Basso 1996, 57). One such occurrence of this was when a Western Apache teenager broke traditional customs by wearing plastic curlers in her hair during a ceremony. A few weeks later, after a family meal, her grandmother suddenly told the story of an Apache police officer who had “behaved too much like a whiteman” (Basso 1996, 56). The teenager ended up throwing the hair curlers away and, years later, when passing Men Stand Above Here And There, the place that had been referenced by her grandmother, she said: “I know that place. It stalks me every day” (Basso 1996, 57). The Western Apache name places after events that occurred there, using the name to reference the story itself and to generate an image of the location that depicts where to stand, sounds you may hear, and things you may see.

While the wrangler’s stories also connect a physical location to a story of the past, they differ greatly. The stories the wranglers share are purely told for entertainment, and do not aim to present the guests with a moral lesson or to develop their social identities. A majority of both guests and wranglers have only surface-level connections to the area, having little-to-no personal or family histories that connect to the land or the people that have inhabited it. This prevents a deeper connection to the area that would allow a story that is connected to the land and aimed at their morals or identities to resonate.

4. A WRANGLER WAY OF SPEAKING

The air smelled of a fresh summer day, mixing with the scent of dust kicked up by the horse's hooves. The sky was a bright blue, and the tiniest amount of white clouds dotted the horizon. The afternoon sun warmed my back and shoulders as I leaned forward atop my horse. Trekking up a hill, I looked back to see the four staff members following me on the ride.

"Great job, you guys!" I called out, seeing each rider lifted up so their seats were off of the saddles. "We are almost at the top, let's keep these two-points up for a little longer!"

The four looked up at me and grinned, with the rider closest to me, Ivan, starting to chuckle.

"Are you using your wrangler voice on me, Madeline?" Ivan asks playfully.

"It's just habit at this point!" I retort with a smile.

My "wrangler" voice, or, as I call it, my customer service voice, resonates from deeper in my chest than my normal style of speaking. On horseback, this helps to project my voice so that it can be heard from multiple horses behind me. My customer service voice also has a slower cadence, whereas my regular voice is softer, faster, and can sometimes blur between words. I also work to make my voice unaccented, whereas my normal style of speaking has a Southern twang when I speak slowly or with central-back vowels like /u/, /o/, /ɔ/, or /OI/ where the monophthongs turn to diphthongs and vice versa. My intonation typically rises at the end of sentences as well so that guests stay attuned to what I am saying, and so that my attitude appears positive (as opposed to bored, annoyed, or any other negative emotion). This is an example of a register, a linguistic phenomenon that is "associated... with particular social practices" (Agha 2004, 24). In this case, the register is associated with the social practice of customer service

where the user is an employee or representative of the entity that is providing goods or services to others.

I found it difficult, on this ride, to not use my customer service voice. I had been conditioned to share the information, stories, and give instructions in that register with guests, so switching out of it to talk to my friends and coworkers took more of an active effort. I had not been explicitly told to use a customer service voice with guests, but years of a customer service job (retail and waitressing), along with the need to project my voice clearly, resulted in my use of that way of speaking. This example of acquiring and using this register is an example of socialization, a process in which a register is acquired (Agha 2004). This particular register is learned through employment, where an individual learns the register as an employee in the service industry. Though the register is not required, and typically not explicitly taught, it is acquired both by observation and experience. An individual may see other employees using the register and test it out for themselves, or an individual may come by the register as a matter of necessity in order to be understood by customers.

This example is also framed by the concept of enregisterment, a process where the features of a particular register become attributed to a specific group of language users (Agha 2005, 38). In this case, the features of the register were attributed to wranglers, or, more broadly, customer service employees. This then links further into Agha's description of linguistic registers, asserting that the use of a particular register "formulates a sketch of the social occasion of language use, indexing contextual features such as interlocutors' roles, relationships, and the type of social practice in which they are engaged" (Agha 2004, 25). My analysis of the customer service register supports this assertion. My use of the particular register is awkward among the staff, even prompting one of the staff members to call out the utterance as such. It is awkward

because the social setting of a staff-only ride is not the same as a regular guest ride; the staff have a more-balanced power dynamic, are in similar roles, and do not need the same instruction as guests typically do. Typically, the customer service register is used when the hearers require more clarity and information. The power dynamic is also different, where the speaker is the knowledge-holder, giving them a certain amount of power, but the hearer also holds a certain amount of power by (typically) paying for the experience or goods. The speaker must negotiate these power dynamics by minimizing the risk for misunderstanding or upsetting the hearer by speaking with clarity (volume, enunciation, minimizing accent) and with a rising intonation (to prevent the hearer from thinking the speaker has a negative attitude or mindset).

Going further into this analysis, the use of this particular customer service register is used and may have developed, in order to satisfy the Gricean maxim of manner. The maxim of manner does not involve *what* is said, but *how*, including making an effort to “avoid obscurity of expression” (Grice 2013, 50). The customer service register involves enunciating vowels and consonants, projecting the voice so it can be clearly heard and understood, and minimizing non-regional accents. This is done in an effort to reduce a potential violation of manner. Moreover, my use of that particular register on the staff ride was a violation of manner. Instead of providing clarity and understanding, the use of the register caused the hearers to become confused, which led the utterance to become slightly obscure. This maxim was not flouted, only violated, but this may have generated assumptions about myself, the speaker. Potential assumptions could be that maybe I do not see as close of a relationship between myself and the staff since I used the same register that is used for guests, or that I am just having a difficult time shifting from the register I typically used when leading rides.

The use of a particular register draws on the concept of performance. The description of oral narrative performance in wrangler storytelling is one aspect of how performance was used in a dude ranch setting, but the involvement of registers further expands this concept since it is not exclusive to narrative storytelling. This concept places the wrangler/speaker in the role of the performer and serves to enhance the experience of the hearers/audience. Broadly, every utterance is considered a performance (Austin 1962), but analyzing this particular set of utterances as a performance allows for an in-depth exploration of the complexity of register and social dynamics. Framing a performance requires identifying relevant concepts specific to that performance: setting, interlocutors, expression, social norms, and the sequence of actions within the event (Bauman 1986, 2). Applying this concept to this particular register and social situation expands the understanding of performance. For this register, the setting would be a customer service environment (the Ranch) where the interlocutors are the speaker/performer (employee/wrangler) and the hearer/audience (guest/customer).

Essentially, the use of a customer service voice is framed by the concepts of register, socialization and enregisterment, and performance, and draws on the theory of the Gricean maxims to support those frameworks. These frameworks allow for an analysis of power dynamics, relationships, and of features specific to the customer service register. This analysis allows for a deeper understanding of social processes involving register, and for human interaction as a whole.

5. COLORFUL LANGUAGE

During my two months in Wyoming, I changed in a number of ways. I got physically and mentally stronger, learned to stand up for myself, increased my critical thinking skills, practiced perseverance, increased my tenacity, and developed myself as a person and a wrangler. Additionally, my language became a lot more colorful, with words like “motherfucker” becoming a regular part of my vocabulary, whereas I previously did not regularly use swear words. This was not just for the fun of it- situations that we were regularly put in as wranglers were so frustrating or challenging that there would be no other way to describe or process them. The challenge became hiding this colorful language from the guests, who did not see the hardships we endured to give them this romanticized experience.

“Motherfucker,” is a word I would use when a horse was not following directions, would try to run me over or step on my foot or hit my head with theirs, or when a horse was just being a downright asshole. This word also got used when a horse would make an unwise decision on the trail, like trying to jump across creeks or rivers. This word choice expressed my frustration and was often said in a tone resembling a growl or in exasperation. This is not the only word I would use, as there were numerous situations that warranted more colorful language.

“Oh hell no!” I screamed, fighting away tears. A little, black, wretched devil spawn fucker, also known as a tick, was attached to my shoulder. I called out for Hope, who was just outside the door, to grab the tweezers and come help. I had never had a tick on me before and my fight or flight instinct kicked in, telling me to freeze. Hope carefully pried the tick off of me as I tried not to hyperventilate, and I held still so she could get it off as quickly as possible.

Successfully detaching all parts of the bloodsucker from my shoulder, she placed it in the sink before handing me a lighter that had multicolored donuts all over it that we had bought at the Dubois grocery store the previous week. I showed no mercy as I lit the tick on fire.

“Fuck this,” I thought as I swung a massive Western saddle atop one of the draft horses, twisting my right shoulder in a way that aggravates my lavatar scapular, an area between my shoulder and neck that I injured while carrying buckets of water-soaked horse feed from the bathroom to the barn since we had no running water. I winced in pain but continued tacking up the horse. The heaviest saddles went on the tallest horses since both were designated for bigger riders. Being one of the taller wranglers, I was able to tack up the bigger draft horses. I was normally happy to do so, but the pain made the process less enjoyable.

Meanwhile, guests stood outside the corral fence, watching us groom and tack up all of the horses that would be ridden that morning. I was filled with annoyance this day as I pushed through the pain, while they did not have to lift a finger themselves. On top of tacking up the horses, the wranglers were also tasked with adjusting the rider’s stirrups, instructing the riders on how to ride that particular horse, and running and grabbing saddle bags for the guests if they requested, attaching the bags to the saddle so the guests had a place to put whatever belongings they thought were necessary for the two-hour ride.

“Let’s go, assholes!” I yelled out, sitting atop the four-wheeler as the sun began peeking out over the mountains. Hope opened the gate to the Sacrifice area at 6:30 am on the dot, and we began to usher the horses out of the dirt paddock, down the hill, and into the corral.

This process usually takes over half an hour, causing the two wranglers who are in charge of getting the horses down that day to be late for breakfast. One of the wranglers would be on the four-wheeler behind the herd, while the other wrangler would be on foot with a lead rope. This wrangler was in charge of chasing the horses off of the grassy area and motivating them to go down the hill, while the wrangler on the four-wheeler chased the stragglers down and made sure none of the horses turned around and ran back up the hill. Since Hope and I were roommates, we were always paired together for the days it was our turn to run them down. Bringing the horses down in the morning usually resulted in rolled ankles, bruises, a hoarse voice, and was generally just not a good way to start the day. The process was incredibly frustrating, and sometimes guests would get in the way, unaware of just how difficult getting 140 horses down the hill and off of the lush, green grass was. They would stand in the way of the four-wheeler or the wrangler on the hill taking pictures, unaware of their surroundings. Or, they would unintentionally act as a block, causing the horses to stop and turn around, creating even more work and frustration for the wranglers. Luckily, this did not happen regularly, and one time the guests who were up there assisted us with bringing them down by chasing them off of the grass along with the second wrangler. This was a welcome surprise, and Hope and I appreciated the help.

“Oh my god, fuck off,” I thought. A guest, one who had been rude to me and to the other guests on the ride that I was leading, had shouted at me to stop. I turned around, wondering what the reason was for the stop. Was someone hurt? Was a horse acting up? No, it turned out, it was none of those. Despite the torrential downpour, she wanted to stop so she could take a picture of the blurry, gray landscape, not having the skill to do it from a horse at the walk. The other guests were annoyed by this, and I silently waited for her to be done as I shivered in the rain.

A full minute later she allowed us to move on, motivated by the downpour turning into hail. I signaled to my horse to move forward, trusting that the guests would know to follow. I did not say a word, I was too cold and did not trust that what would come out of my mouth would be very nice.

We had about a half mile left until we would be at the Ranch. I silently went through decision-making processes in my head, working to ensure I was still able to make rational decisions. I was so cold, and then I suddenly felt warm, and I was worried I had contracted hypothermia. The processes I went through helped to ease my mind that maybe I had not. Luckily, we all safely made it back to the Ranch, and, to this day, this was the worst ride I had ever been on.

“Can you just shut the fuck up?” I thought as I halted my lead horse in front of the Old Homestead Cabin, using a couple ounces of self-control to not say that thought aloud.

The guests I was leading continued to talk over me, despite the ride being clearly stopped, the wooden structure in front of them, and my multiple attempts to tell the story associated with the cabin. I wait another couple minutes to see if their self-awareness will increase enough to allow me to share the story, keenly aware of how long the ride was already taking and that others would be waiting on us to get back to the Ranch. I shared a look with Hope, the back wrangler, who was equally annoyed, the chatter around us so loud that silent communication was the only effective way to share how we felt. Waiting for silence was futile, and by the time one of the guests realized what was happening and tried to get the others to stop talking, I had given up and signaled that the ride would be moving on.

“Fucking bitch!” Rob yelled, reaching up and smacking the horse whose hoof he had been holding between his knees.

The mare had kicked out at him and yanked her foot from his grasp while he was filing her hoof down, preparing to shoe her. He angrily dragged her foot up again in another attempt to trim the mare’s overgrown hoof, an essential part of horse care that Rob had learned to do from his years spent as a horseman. This farrier work took place before dinner after the rides for the day were completed. Rob used both hands to work the file back and forth, hunched over in a position that would cause anyone back pain, while the guests sat in the Lodge for cocktail hour.

“And I was like, what the hell?” I said to Hope, laughing, as I told her what had happened that Monday morning.

A foal, less than a week old, had died in the night. Before anyone realized, the guests had ridden past the scene as we led them to the arena for their riding evaluations where we learned about their experience level and placed them into groups for the week based on their skill level. The predominant theory was that it had been killed and eaten by wolves or a bear, so the body could not be moved until Fish and Game agents came out to look. I was the back wrangler for one of these groups, and as we walked past the body one of the guests turned around to talk to me.

“Do you think we could ask [the owners] to let us keep the skull?” She asked.

“Um...” I hesitated. “You would have to ask them, I don’t know. Why?”

“I just think it’s so cool! Like, that would be so cool to go home with the skull. This whole cycle of life is so interesting.”

I stayed silent, thinking “What the fuck”.

While, yes, death is natural and in the cycle of life, this lady was so out of touch with what had happened that I was astounded. This foal was the product of one of the owner's breeding programs, representing many hours of tracking reproductive cycles, financial investment, and the future of the Ranch. Further, if the foal had indeed been killed by a predator, that was a threat to every animal on the Ranch. Plus, this was a sensitive topic, and her blatant insensitivity for the life of the foal and the Ranch was surprising to me.

Later, it was determined that the foal had died as a result of a genetic condition, and the woman was not allowed to even touch the skeleton.

"Shit," I say out loud, reaching a hand up to my neck.

While leading a ride atop Tundra, I had turned around to check to make sure all of the guests and the back wrangler had made it up the hill successfully. When I turned around to face forward again, I hadn't seen a sharp branch sticking out from the trees we were riding next to. Despite the bandana tied around my neck, the branch cut right across my throat. My heart leapt in my chest, and I reached a hand up to my neck to check the damage. Feeling around, I didn't think it was deep enough to warrant medical attention, but the cut stung with pain and blood was on my fingers where I had touched the wound. I turned around atop Tundra to the guest who was following right behind me.

"Am I bleeding?" I asked her, pulling my bandana down so she could see my neck.

Her eyes widened and she nodded. "Not too bad though," she answered.

"Okay, thank you," I said, releasing a breath.

Continuing on the ride, my neck continued to sting. "I'm a lucky son of a bitch," I thought.

The cut left a temporary scar on my neck that went away after a few weeks. From then on, in addition to watching for spider webs and holes while I was the lead wrangler, I also made sure to be keenly aware of any branches I could encounter.

“This is bullshit,” I thought. I had not signed up to be a children’s wrangler, yet here I was, leading a four-person ride made up of a five-year-old, a seven-year-old, and their two parents who thought it would be a great idea to have their kids ride horses through the rough Wyoming backcountry when only one of them had ever been on a horse. This was no place for children that young who could barely control a horse, let alone their own emotions or understand enough to follow directions. The parents were no help either; when asked to steer a certain way or to follow a certain direction, they would look at you with the most dumbfounded expression. No matter how nice they were, these guests were intolerable for their lack of awareness or ability to understand, and I couldn’t wait for them to leave as I silently seethed at being stuck with them multiple times that week.

“Oh shit,” I exclaimed to my boyfriend who I was on FaceTime with. “I’ve got to go, something is happening”.

I had been sitting in the open trunk of my car as the sun was setting, talking to Zane as I usually did after dinner, when I began to notice one of the owners of the Ranch sprint to the corral while she was talking frantically on the phone to someone. One of the other wranglers, Katie, followed her out, and I noticed Alex, Holly, and Hope moved towards the corral as well. I hung up the phone and hopped out of my car, closing the trunk before going to join them.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“All of the horses got out at Cow Camp,” the owner answered. “I was able to spot them heading this way.”

I looked at Hope next to me with wide eyes. Rob and Rachel had taken some horses up to the Shoshone National Forest that morning for Cow Camp, an experience that the Ranch offered where guests would go on all-day pack rides and camp out in the Forest near where the cattle were.

All of the wranglers were now gathered in the tacking-up corral in pajamas, and we opened the gate so the horses would be funneled into the pen. About ten minutes later, the horses came galloping in. Some of them looked unscathed, while one had a massive gash on his leg. Some of the guests came out of the heated Lodge to ogle at the horses as we worked, and Emma shooed them away. We immediately began tending to the small herd, looking them over and doctoring two gray geldings who were cut up. As we applied medicine and bandaged up the horses, some of us came to a realization and exchanged a look amongst ourselves when we realized that Spence, a chestnut gelding who had gone up to Cow Camp, was not there.

These situations illustrate some of the frustrations and difficulties that the wranglers and myself encountered while working at the Ranch. These difficulties were often hidden from the guests who had a vastly different experience. The guest experience was highly sanitized, and while this is understandable given that they are paying for this experience, this lends itself to a misunderstanding of the work and grit that is required for working on a ranch. The use of swear words displays this concept of grit, a quality that the wranglers possessed and utilized while pushing their mental and physical strength through daily ranch work and the various problems that arose.

The curse words demonstrated the intense emotions that the wranglers encountered, acting as intense descriptors and as a coping strategy. Classifying swear words as a coping strategy stems from their assistance in the mental and physical tenacity of the user. Richard Stephens published multiple studies that tested the use of swear words as a coping strategy. One of these studies found that when participants submerged their hand in ice water, using a conventional curse word such as “fuck” increased the participant’s pain threshold by 32% and their pain tolerance by 33%, compared to those who did not use a curse word (Stephens 2020). Another one of these studies found that, when repeating a swear word, “participants were able to achieve increased power on a high resistance bike pedaling task and a stronger hand grip”, compared to those who used a neutral word (Stephens 2018, 116). These studies corroborate the idea of swear words as a mental and physical coping strategy that aids the user in accomplishing tasks.

This idea is strengthened by my ethnographic research and is demonstrated by a situation that occurred while working with a young colt. Working as a team, Hope, Alex, and I were attempting to walk the colt through a maze of poles on the ground. I held onto the lead rope while Hope and Alex stood on either side of him, stroking him and making sure he stayed calm. The barn was quiet in an effort to foster a calm environment that the young horse would feel comfortable in, but the activity level outside of the corral began to pick up as it was nearing the end of the day. The colt stumbled through the maze, stepping over the poles instead of around, so we led him around the ring to start it again. As we walked, the slam of a car door next to the corral broke the silence, and the colt erupted into activity. He spun around so he was now facing me and pulled back, rising onto his back legs slightly and throwing his head around. Hope and Ky ran to flank me, jumping out of the way of his body. My grip on the lead rope tightened, the

word “fuck!” coming out between my gritted teeth. I sank back into my hips, leveraging my body weight and balance against the spooking horse. My hands strained and I closed my fists tighter around the rope, not wanting to let go, as my feet dragged through the dirt with his effort to break free. This horse was terrible to catch, often running away from people who came to halter him, and I did not want to have to chase him around. Further, his bolting would disrupt the other group of wranglers and the colt they were working with more so than he had already disrupted them, and it would show him that he could physically bully his way out of situations he did not want to be in. The colt eventually calmed and came to stand still, not succeeding in his escape attempt. While the swear word may or may not have been the reason for my ability to continue to hold onto the rope, I believe it came as a result of my determination that allowed me to push through any weakness I had been feeling. The utterance may also have increased my grip strength and pain tolerance, an ability of the word shown in Stephens (2018) and Stephens (2020).

In addition to fortifying physical and mental strength, the use of swear words also strengthened the interpersonal relationships between the wranglers. This draws on Bronislaw Malinowski’s idea of phatic communion: “a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words” (Malinowski 1923, 315). Originally drawn from how humans will silently coordinate their uses of phatic communion to break uncomfortable silences, such as asking about the weather, the concept is expanded to assert the idea that language can be used for more than just communication, and can also be used to forge relationships and strengthen personal ties amongst users.

I argue that the use of swear words is an example of phatic communion; given the taboo nature of the words, using them generates the implicature that the user feels comfortable enough

with the hearer to use them. This then establishes trust between the speaker and the hearer, where the speaker trusts the hearer to accept the utterance and not protest the usage and the hearer understands the trust that the speaker placed in their relationship.

Furthermore, the usage of a swear word in certain situations, as opposed to non-swear words, allows for a greater description of what the speaker is feeling. Swear words can act as intensifiers, highlighting the description of a feeling or situation, which allows the hearers to connect with what the speaker is experiencing. This is shown in the tick situation, where my use of a taboo word highlighted the fear that I was experiencing. Hope, the hearer, would then be able to decode this panic and generate a greater level of empathy, as opposed to if I had remained calm and used language without the curse which would have concealed the emotions I was feeling.

The use of curse words served multiple uses. Their presence in the wranglers' experience demonstrates the difficulties that ranch workers endured and the personal qualities needed to succeed in the social and physical environment, an environment that the guests did not experience in the same way. These descriptions highlight the dichotomy between the wrangler and guest experience, the latter of which is sanitized and romanticized, as shown in previous chapters. The swear words also serve to aid the user's mental and physical strength, and serve to foster stronger relationships between the speaker and the hearer. This leads to a greater possibility of empathy between the conversational participants, and for that empathy to reach a deeper level.

PART 2: MULTISPECIES COMMUNICATION

6. UNDER PRESSURE



Image 3. A hideout of outlaw Butch Cassidy, located only a few miles from the Ranch. Photo by Madeline Lee

The pale sun is shining through the trees, warming up the cool ground that crunches with the four-beat-gait of the horse's walk. I lead the first ride of the morning and as I peek back to ensure that all of the guests are following behind me, I also check to make sure I can see the back wrangler, Rachel. This was Rachel's second year working at the Ranch, but her main job was working at and leading Cow Camp with Rob up in the Shoshone National Forest. Cow Camp began the first weekend in June and lasted until the last weekend in September when the Ranch's cattle grazed in the Forest. When Cow Camp was not in session, Rachel acted as a wrangler with the rest of the group. Her dark brown hair was usually worn in a French braid underneath a baseball cap, the cap being replaced by a helmet when riding. She almost always wore a collared ranching shirt when working, and she was sure to always cover her face with sunscreen. Her blue eyes glistened with amusement, ready to spring a joke at any time. She answered all of the

wrangler's questions with understanding, never making me feel stupid, and shared with the other wranglers what she had learned during her years of wrangling experience. Her dog, Grady, is never far away from her side, and you can usually find the pair next to Rob and his border collie, Penny. Rachel is originally from New York state, roughly around the Syracuse area, but she has lived in Wyoming for a good part of her 20s, first being introduced to the area when elk hunting with her dad.

Rachel is only a few years older than me, around 25 years old, but her maturity and knowledge of horses and the land make her seem a lot wiser. She taught me the names of the wildflowers that I often see on the trails, also including which ones were poisonous, edible, key identifiers, nicknames, and even the histories of some of the flowers. Lupine, for example, is often mistaken for lavender, but it is highly toxic to many animals including horses. Stonecrop is another common plant we see on our routes, its yellow/orange color blending in with other flowers. Stonecrop is edible, Rachel taught, but only the stem and leaves and only before it blooms. After it blooms, the plant becomes toxic.

This morning, we were going on the Butch Cassidy trail. Rachel rode Lou, a lazy 4-year-old mare, and I sat atop Willow, another 4-year-old mare who was more on the nervous side. Both mares were young with shiny black manes and tails. Lou was a bright brown and Willow was more of a duller brown, but both mares were still classified as bay. I had ridden both horses before, and while Lou frustrated some of the wranglers for being more "slow than go", I often encountered problems with Willow at water crossings. If she were the lead horse, she would refuse to cross the water, coming to a stop and requiring lots of urging from the rider to get her to move forward. While this would often hold up the ride for a couple of extra seconds, I had never had an issue like the one I had on the Butch Cassidy trail that day.

We were walking through the final wooded section of the trail, about eight guests sandwiched between me and Rachel. This section included the largest water crossing of the trail, requiring the horse and rider to move diagonally through Poll Creek against the flow of water to reach the exit that was about five meters away. The rainy weather we had been having meant that the water level was quite high and moving faster than normal, but the crossing was still safe. Leading up to the water crossing you have to duck around some reeds and willow branches, going around a short corner to enter the creek from a small patch of wet sand.

As soon as her hooves touched the sandy creek shoreline, Willow leapt back dramatically. Still on her back and firmly in the saddle, I was shoved into a tree, branches scraping my face and neck. I pushed these out of the way with my hand and used my crop on her hindquarters to get her to move forward. Once again, I was shoved into the tree branches. The guests were right behind me, and Willow freaking out was causing the entrance to become incredibly crowded. I kicked my heels into her sides, but she remained firmly planted. My cheeks flushed red as I became more frustrated with the mare, and I took a second to breathe and regain my composure.

I began going through my options in my head. Getting off and leading her on foot through the water was impossible; the creek was too high, as was the risk of me getting hurt. I knew Willow would follow horses through water, but I knew that the guests behind me would not be able to lead at this moment. The trail was too narrow for Rachel and Lou to come up to the front to lead us through. In short, my options were limited. With no idea how to handle the current situation, I called out to Rachel in the back, telling her that Willow would not cross. I heard rustling and less than a minute later Rachel emerged from the trail behind me on foot, having tied Lou to a tree.

“I’m not going to be able to lead her across,” Rachel instructed, “but I can lead her up to the water.”

Grabbing the side of Willow’s bridle, Rachel pulled the young mare to the edge of the creek. I added pressure with my legs to no avail. Willow leapt back, and I was pushed into the tree once again.

“Let’s try that again, but we are going to do pressure and release,” Rachel said. “But you’re going to have to really ride her. Apply pressure, and as soon as she takes a step release it. Then repeat.”

I nodded, the words “ride her” echoing in my head. Rachel pulled and I squeezed my heels into her sides. Willow stepped forward, and I removed my heels. We then repeated these actions until her hooves touched the water. I felt her start to hesitate and want to move backward, but I applied pressure again with my heels.

“Ride her!” Rachel called, the position forcing her to be unable to pull Willow forward. Willow hesitated before pushing onward into the water, moving quickly through Poll Creek. She leapt out onto the opposite bank, and I forced her to hold steady and halt on the dry shoreline as I waited for the guests to cross the water. Rachel turned, untying Lou from the tree, and hopped back on. We continued along the trail, successfully navigating the final two water crossings with a lot less fuss.

A few days later, I found myself alone in the corral with Rachel. I stayed behind from the afternoon rides, instead being charged with doctoring horses, sorting Founder horses, and feeding the three horses that needed to be fed in the afternoons. The wranglers took turns being the one to stay back so I had no complaints, my body welcoming the break from the saddle. Rachel was

doing her own thing and had pulled Donna, an unbacked (not broke to ride) young Fjord mare, out of the corral, tying her to a post in the tacking-up corral. Rachel holds a long, cream-colored wand in one hand, and is running her other hand up and down the mare's legs, applying pressure with her fingers on the ligament that runs from the back of the horse's knee to its hoof, getting the Fjord to pick her leg up. Rachel holds it off the ground for a few moments before setting it back down, patting the horse on the neck. According to Rob, a horse that will pick its feet up is probably going to be easier to ride than one that can't, the idea behind that being that a horse that will not pick up its feet is harder to handle and does not listen.

I asked Rachel to explain what she was doing so that I could learn, especially since the rest of the wranglers were going to start the unbacked four-year-old Arabian horses soon. She began by building on what I already knew, which is that licking and chewing was one way to tell that a horse is relaxed. However, she explained that "chewing isn't always good if you get the wrong answer," and that it was important to "end on a good note every single time that you possibly can."

"With babies," Rachel explained, "it's really easy to ask them for too much. Then they freak out, they give you the wrong answer to the point where you can't control it. That's like getting bucked off, or them pulling their legs away, or you can't get them to turn in a circle, and then you give up. That's making them worse because that's what they're going to remember, that's going to be the release of pressure for them."

"Ohhh," I breathe out, digesting this new information.

"That's the only communication that we have with horses is pressure and release," Rachel continues. "Because that's the only communication that they have with each other."

"So, like, you pick up her foot," I start.

“Yeah,” Rachel hedges.

“And you don’t let her take it.”

“Yeah, don’t let her take it. Ideally, you’re going to know mentally how much she’s able to handle, and incrementally, that’s going to increase. Then eventually she’ll stand completely still for the farrier. She’ll understand she needs to hold it there, but like you ask for baby baby steps and slowly build up, or else they just will, like, never get there. And some horses are a lot smarter than others.”

As I reflect on this, I think about ways that my communication with horses involves pressure. As I ride, the bit applies pressure to the mouth, and the reins to the bit; my legs and heels apply pressure to the horse’s sides; my seat can apply and alleviate pressure in the saddle, which can signal the horse to slow their stride, lengthen, speed up, or stop; the crop applies pressure through contact. On the ground, pressure can be applied through the halter and lead rope, through my body position, or through a stick or crop.

There are also different ways to apply pressure through the use of the same aid. Typically, in English and Western riding, the rider’s hands rest above the mane of the horse while holding the reins. When riding a nervous horse, or when jumping a horse that might be apt to duck out of the jump, one trick is to place your hands down and to the sides of the horse’s neck. This applies a different type of pressure to the bit and acts as a sort of funnel to keep the horse on a straight path with more consistent pressure.

While pressure plays a large role in riding, I don’t believe that this is the sole communication that we have with horses or that they have with each other. For example, the position of a horse’s ears signals if they are interested in something or happy by facing forward,

while they can signal that a horse is unhappy, or angry and that the other entities should cease the activity they were doing by being pinned back. Younger horses will also clack, a behavior that involves pulling their nose back and opening and closing their mouths to elicit a clacking sound, to older horses to signal that they are younger and not a threat.

As the rider, there are other ways that I can communicate with a horse as well. If I am nervous or anxious, the horse will pick up on that and react, whereas if I am calm and relaxed, the horse is more likely to be as well. I can also use my voice to signal a change in gait: saying “woah” will cause a horse to stop or at least slow to a walk, while some horses are trained to trot when the rider says “trot”. You can also use your mouth to click, cluck, or make a kissing noise to get a horse to change gait. Some riders also sing to their mounts, something I have been known to do when I am riding a more anxious horse, which can aid in calming both the horse down and yourself, as well as with timing over jumps. Riders are also taught that their eyes are another communicative tool, with trainers often shouting for riders to “look up” instead of at the ground or directly at an obstacle, or else “that is where you will end up”. The eyes signal to the rest of the rider’s body to open up, namely the chest and shoulders, which aid in directing a horse and improving confidence.

Individual horses, like humans, have preferences on how they would like to be communicated with. A good rider reads what a horse’s communication preference is and adjusts themselves to that communication style. One example occurs with bit contact, the piece of a bridle that goes into the horse’s mouth and connects to the reins. Some horses prefer more contact with the bit, meaning that the rider will have shorter reins. Without this contact, they can feel lost and will search for contact in different ways like pulling down with their head and neck.

Other horses prefer little to no contact with the bit, meaning that the rider will have longer reins. If a rider's reins are too short, the horse may react by pulling their head and neck up and back, bobbing their head up and down, or through other reactions such as bucking.

Shortening and lengthening the reins is not just a technique but is also a language. This language can be spoken verbally but is mostly transmitted through various types of pressure, emotion, and body language. This language can have misunderstandings where one party doesn't listen, where one party may think they are communicating one thing when in reality they are communicating something completely different, or where one party misunderstands the communication. For example, pressure via the reins can communicate to a horse that they should perform a certain action including, but not limited to, turning, jump takeoff, and moving laterally. In order to be communicated correctly, other signals are used in tandem such as the rider's seat, leg, voice, or eyes. These other signals can also be used to emphasize communication, which is similar to volume in spoken language. Importantly, the language between horses and humans communicates much more than action, also conveying trust.

At the Ranch, wranglers are taught that if they ever become lost on the trail, they should lengthen the reins of the horse they are leading on and that horse will lead them back home. When the rider gives up this aspect of control, the reins, and bit contact, they are giving full trust and control to the horse. The horse understands this exchange and takes the lead in both the ride and the partnership between them and the rider.

This is further emphasized when the wranglers are teaching the guests how to ride the horses. Every Monday, the first day that the new guests of the week ride, the wranglers do a demonstration that shows how the Ranch's horses prefer to be ridden: loose reins, a light seat, and little leg contact. Guests that have previous equestrian experience are often not used to this,

as many show horses are taught the opposite, but guests of all abilities can struggle with this relinquishing of control. In this case, the guests are not learning the full language of this type of communication, but they are learning snippets, or phrases, that allow them to get by during the week of riding. The communication is simplified for the guests, minimizing the intricacies and complexities that represent the language. The full breadth of the language involves various techniques like riding aids, calm emotions, and trust.

Back in Oklahoma, I was discussing these communication strategies with an equestrian trainer, Mary. She has grown up riding horses and still competes to this day in various disciplines, such as eventing and dressage, at around 70 years old. As we talked, she began telling me about how she would prepare for eventing shows. Eventing is an equestrian competition that involves three different phases: dressage, cross country, and stadium show jumping; this is one of the events at the Olympics. Cross country involves various obstacles, known as questions, that the rider and horse must maneuver such as jumps or going through water. These questions are laid out on a grass course, not in an arena.

Before cross country or show jumping rounds, riders are allowed to walk the course on foot so that they can map out where they are going, distances to and between jumps, difficult spots on the course, different approaches, and more.

“Every time I would walk the course,” Mary began, “if there was water, I would have to take off my shoes and socks and walk into it. If I didn’t do this, my horse wouldn’t go into the water. We would have whole conversations on the course without saying a word out loud. He would ask me, “How deep is the water”? And I would tell him, “Oh, it’s up to my calf”, or “It’s past my knee”. “What is at the bottom?” he would ask, and I would tell him “It’s smooth rocks”.

If I couldn't answer these questions, he would not go in the water, so every time I walked the course I had to do this. Riding, it's all about trust, them trusting you and you trusting them."

The communication of trust between a horse and rider is shown in numerous ways. Earlier in this ethnography, it was shown when I was able to fully turn around while riding Tundra at the walk and trot. By not having my body facing the direction of movement, and by giving him enough rein length so that I could turn around, this communicated to him that I fully trusted him enough to not take off or throw me off, that his feet would not falter, and that he knew to follow the trail carved out in front of us. This trust was also displayed when Tundra and I went after Aurora when she refused to listen to her rider. I trusted Tundra to not take off and stop listening like Aurora had, and I communicated to him that I was depending on him to help in this situation. In all of these situations, trust was communicated from the rider to the horse in subtle ways such as looking and turning away from the direction of movement, lengthening the reins, and using the horse to assist in an emergency. This communication was unspoken and subtle, but the impact was exceptional.

Communication between horse and rider does not only occur with riding but with groundwork and training as well. In Wyoming, Alex and I had the opportunity to learn about natural horsemanship from Holly, an experienced horsewoman who has worked on the professional show jumping circuit and has trained horses and riders. Alex and I sat atop the tall wooden fence of the round pen, a very small circular arena, watching Holly work with one of the more difficult horses.

"Some horse training is about dominance, it uses the roles of predator and prey," Holly explained. "I don't use this. I take fly, flight, or freeze responses and change it to 'I see you'. I

change it from ‘you must’ to encouragement. I can have a conversation with him and ask him to turn.”

With this training, Holly utilized her body position and a lead rope to encourage the horse to follow certain directions. With the horse off the lead, Holly might position herself by the hindquarters facing forward, encouraging the horse to continue traveling in the direction it is facing. She may thump the lead rope on her own body to signal the horse to move faster, change direction, or to pay attention to her. All of this is done with little spoken language between Holly and the horse, but she almost always gets the result that she is looking for.

Language does not have to be spoken to be classified as a language, nor does it have to represent what we think of as words. Signed languages are one example of this, where American Sign Language does not represent English in a word-to-word translation, nor does it model itself off of traditional English grammar. Another example is with silence, which carries meaning in all forms of discourse but is especially exemplified in Buddhist tradition where nonverbal language is emphasized and “silence [carries] several communicative functions” (Huszár 2016, 64). Even with a lack of spoken or written components, silence here serves as a way to communicate, showing that these components do not need to be present to be classified as a language.

This brings in the concept of language ideologies, which involve “assumptions such as what the ‘correct’ or ‘standard’ form of a language is” (Hauck 2016, 11). Some hold ideologies that do not recognize human-equine communication as a language, however, I believe this is done when those individuals compare multispecies communication to their own or evaluate the language with respect to formal linguistic features. Alessandro Duranti, when discussing what it means to have a language, stated that “the conventionality of linguistic systems and their

arbitrary nature have often obfuscated their historicity, the experience that lives in them and through them” (Duranti 1997, 334). Taking from this, the discussion of whether communication with horses is a language or not based upon ideas of syntax, morphology, phonology, and theoretical linguistics overall is a moot point. Rather, the discussion should be focused on how language between horses and humans has been represented and evolved throughout history, how this language is embodied and experienced, and how communication occurs in ways that don’t model it against traditional linguistic forms.

Furthermore, to add more evidence that horse-human communication is a language, I want to highlight Roman Jakobson’s six functions of language, specifically the poetic, phatic, emotive, and conative functions. The latter two, emotive and conative language functions, are functions that are unable to be assessed by truth values, as these are interjections or intonations that encode a message from the speaker to the hearer. As such, these cannot be assessed by the ideas of ‘true’ or ‘false’. The poetic function is what I deem as the fun part of language, as these are aspects of language that manipulate the delivery of the speech act. The phatic function that Jakobson details is linked to Malinowski’s aspect of phatic communion, and it highlights how the content is not the focus of the language, but the relationship between the hearer and the speaker is (Duranti 1997, 284-285).

Horse-human communication is able to function within these ideas of language. The language has poetic function, seen in how the users choose to send messages to the other. An example of this is with patting the horse: some people may choose to reach up the horse’s neck and give them a large pat while others choose to give a smaller scratch closer to the withers. In this case, the message is the same but the delivery is different. The emotive function of language appears with how the horse communicates to the rider about how they are feeling. This cannot

have a truth value associated with it, but the rider is able to interpret the horse's cues, and the horse is able to tell the rider, what attitude they may have: if they like or dislike something by their ears, if they spook at something. The conative function is also represented in multispecies communication between horses and humans, despite horses not necessarily having the ability to produce intonation that humans understand. However, the language does have the ability to orient the users, whether the direction is aimed towards the horse or rider, or to another being or entity outside of the pairing. So, where is the horse's kick aimed, or how strong is the rider's halt cue with the reins or their seat. These three functions, along with the phatic function discussed throughout the presentation, show that human-horse communication meets four of the six functions of language, adding strength to the argument that it is, and should be considered, a language.

7. TURN FROM RAIN



Image 4. Horses in the corral stand quietly during a rainstorm on June 2, 2023, facing away from the direction the rain is coming in. Photo by Madeline Lee.

The first of July had been a long-awaited day for wranglers, guests, and Ranch owners alike. It marked the start of the three-month period where the Ranch's Highland and Angus cattle

would graze in the Shoshone National Forest, and the first Saturday of the month marked the day when we would gather up all of the cattle and herd them from the Ranch property, across the government-owned land, and through the gates into the Forest. We had been preparing all week for the cattle drive, and it all led up to today. The morning started as any other as the wranglers tacked up the horses and packed lunches in saddle bags. The corral was filled with activity since every guest and wrangler would be riding that day. I would be riding Bearclaw, a four-year-old bay draft horse gelding. He was one of the biggest horses in the herd, but he was also green, meaning inexperienced. Nevertheless, he was fun to ride and I enjoyed riding him.

The cattle drive began underneath a pale blue sky dotted with clouds, the peaceful weather concealing what would come. The riders split into groups that went in different directions as the over 200 head of cattle were clustered around the property. The groups gradually got smaller, and my group went from being led by myself and one of the owners to just me. As a team, the six guests and I directed about 30 Black Angus cattle toward the forest, chasing down any calves or heifers that tried to break the formation. In order to not spook the cattle we drove them forward at a walk, and I was able to make light conversation with the guests around me. As I was talking to Peggy, a longtime guest of the Ranch who had done the cattle drive for many years, I felt an unmistakable drop of rain.

Suddenly, a crack of lightning splits the sky, and not far behind comes the boom of thunder. Bearclaw startles, feinting sideways a few steps before regaining composure. I look towards the sky and see gray thunderclouds covering the clear blue day. They grow darker and I avert my gaze from above to scan around me, looking for the guests that were a part of my group.

“Is everyone okay?” I called out. The guests nod, sounding off that they were indeed okay.

I strained my eyes to the distance, looking to see what the other groups were doing, but was unable to see anyone else due to the distance between us and the trees dividing the ravine. With being unable to see other wranglers, I was also unable to know what to do next. Rain began to beat down and I quickly summoned the guests to cluster around me and to leave the cattle. Based on my understanding of cattle that I have picked up during my time at the Ranch, they shouldn’t run off. My prediction was correct, and the cattle moved to cluster underneath the aspen trees.

“Can I get off my horse?” One guest asks, nervously looking up at me as the rain picks up.

“Of course,” I answer.

“If anyone else wants to get off, feel free to do so,” I called out to the group over the sound of the storm. “If you need help, let me know, and please hold on to your horse.”

The nervous rider and one other guest opt to dismount, the rest of the group choosing to remain on their horses. I work to conceal my own anxiety. The storm grows angrier, the wind chilling my soaking hair peeking out from beneath my helmet and covering my arms in goosebumps. My light jacket is easily overpowered by the torment, and I can feel every impact as hail joins the rain. My brain churns with ways to try to ensure the safety of the guests (and myself). The storm came out of nowhere, and I was unsure of how long it would last.

As I was formulating a plan, Bearclaw began to shift. His movements were not frantic or spooky, and I calmly loosened my reins to give him his head, allowing him more freedom. At this moment, I was trusting him to not only not run off but to also set a good example for the

nervous guests. The young draft horse began turning his body so that he was facing away from the direction of the storm, and by extension, my body also turned to face away. I suddenly recall a picture I had taken earlier in the summer during a rainstorm of all of the horses in the corral turned in the same direction to face away from the rain. While his body was tense against the cold storm, I could sense that he was calmer overall. Instead of fighting his natural instincts, I went with them, which not only prevented conflict between us but also helped to protect me, shielding my face and the front of my body from the hail strikes.

“All,” I call out. “Let your horses turn away from the storm!”

The group followed my direction, including the riders who had dismounted. Our horses stand shoulder to shoulder, and I allow myself to relinquish control of the young gelding I was on. I curl forward into myself, conserving my body heat, and notice some guests following my lead. We were completely vulnerable, but based on my understanding of equine communication, I knew the horses would not run off while the storm continued.

Eventually, the storm passed and we continued to move the cattle up into the Shoshone National Forest. By understanding the nature of horses, knowing how to communicate with them, and not fighting their natural instincts, the safety of everyone involved was ensured. The horse’s instincts demanded that they remain still and face away from the direction of the rain and hail, and my communication with Bearclaw allowed him to follow his natural behavior instead of fighting him. I understood that giving him control of his head was a display of trust, a fundamental piece of equestrian communication.

I believe that these examples of multispecies communication with horses challenge previously held beliefs of what being human inherently provides and anthropocentric ideas

surrounding those beliefs, which “places humans not only at the center of everything but makes “us” the most important measure of all things” (Probyn-Rapsey 2018, 47). I draw this definition of anthropocentrism out to include the ideas that the world and its entirety revolves around human beings, and that being human ordains one with more value than other species which are lesser-than. Multispecies communication between horse and rider blurs the boundaries between human and non-human, instead requiring the concept of togetherness or “with” that is touched on in Cypher (2022) and Kohn (2013). Cypher (2022) conceptualizes this in regard to methodology where the researcher not only observes but also experiences and the fieldwork is “not just... ‘about’ but also ‘with’” (Cypher 2022, 242). This clashes with the idea of humans as a supreme species as the requirement of doing this fieldwork with other species treats non-human entities as equal research partners. Rubber Boots Methodology also insinuates that this fieldwork wouldn’t be possible without this cooperation, which also challenges the idea that humans are inherently better or all-knowing. These same ideas are challenged by Kohn’s detailing of the relationships between the Runa people of Ecuador, their dogs, and the predatory jaguars of the area. Kohn describes the entanglements between these beings and what the concept of “*puma*”, jaguars, represents. The book opens with a warning for Kohn to sleep facing upwards so that the jaguar would not attack him. The details of the encounter bring forth the idea that interactions with non-human species “force us to recognize the fact that seeing, representing, and perhaps knowing, even thinking, are not exclusively human affairs” (Kohn 2013, 1). My research supports this idea by displaying how successful communication with horses relies on various degrees of trust: trust in the horse and their body, thinking, knowledge, and instincts. This is a humbling concept, one that was shown through my trust in Bearclaw during the hail storm where I understood that at that moment, his knowledge and instincts were better than mine. He saw the

situation unfolding and knew what to do better than I did, a display of situational awareness and instinctual knowledge that proved better than my own in that moment. It is important to note, however, that Cypher (2022) and Kohn (2013) come from opposing schools of thought in regard to multispecies communication and ethnography. I loosely connect these ideas, but acknowledge their inherent differences and how my research more-closely aligns with Cypher (2022), as the ideas of dreams and jaguars do not connect to the groundedness and context of my ethnography.

Kohn continues with this concept of “with”, describing how, in his fieldwork, “These processes of “becoming with” others change what it means to be alive; and they change what it means to be human just as much as they change what it means to be a dog or even a predator” (Kohn 2013, 150). Building on this conceptual framework, the experience and ability of a person to successfully communicate with horses alter the idea of what it means to be human. The belief that humans control animals by overpowering or commanding them is false, and the notion is eradicated by successful multispecies communication which places the entities in a partnership based on trust and understanding. The concept of the horse is also transformed from a tool or object to a partner. The idea of a horse as a partner is shown in Mary’s earlier testimony of trust, as well as my own experiences with horses.

The simple act of turning away from the rain encompasses the idea of “with” and challenges previous anthropocentric ideas. Surrendering to the horse signified a humbling moment of trust in the equine species as a whole and their innate nature, and trust in the individual horse I was on. All control was relinquished, and the conversation transformed from a negotiation of movement to a gesture of respect and humility, understanding that I, as a human, was not the exclusive holder of knowledge or thought processes. In an abstract sense, turning

away from the rain signifies a turning away from anthropocentrism, and renegotiates the idea of power associated with being human.

8. EMPATHY ACROSS SPECIES

The end of June at the Ranch granted us a reprieve from the rain, bringing on clear blue skies and a dry heat I had not experienced before. One of the weeks in that dry heat had been set aside for the wranglers, under the instruction of Elle, to start the five four-year-old Arabians. Throughout the week, we would work with each of the young horses on moving from pressure, steering, wearing a saddle, starting and stopping, and wearing a bit, all to culminate at the end of the week with them getting backed, or being able to have a rider on them.

One exercise that Elle taught us to do is to place a saddle pad, a white pad that an English saddle rests on, onto the horse's back. We then walk the horse forward and slowly pull the pad off until it falls to the ground. As soon as it reaches the ground, we instruct the horse to halt immediately. This exercise helps to prepare for a horse to understand that a loss of pressure when being ridden means stop, and also helps to condition them not to spook or run away after a rider falls, which is important in minimizing harm to the rider and the horse.

Hope and I were performing this exercise with Farasi, a beautiful dappled dark gray colt. He had established himself as the difficult one of the group, running away from wranglers when they would try to catch him in the corral and being incredibly difficult to work with on his right side.

Elle's preferred method of training was known as the T-Touch method, and it required that people work in pairs or a trio while training a horse. It is a gentler method, opposing

traditional ‘cowboy’ methods of training where a rider just gets on and rides it out. T-Touch also utilizes long, white wands that act as an extension of the person’s hand. The horse is not afraid of these wands, and eventually, they become soothing to the horse as the trainers rub the horse with them all over its body.

I was positioned on the left side of Farasi’s head, holding one of the long white wands at his chest and the lead rope, while Hope was on Farasi’s right side, tasked with pulling the saddle pad off. We walked forward and she inched the pad off little by little until it came tumbling to the ground.

The colt startled, leaping into Hope and onto her foot.

“Fucking get off me!” She yelled in pain and frustration, shoving him off.

I pulled the lead rope in the opposite direction of her to assist. His reaction was dramatic and reached a level the other young horses had not even touched. His dark gray head was raised in the air, a beautiful but barely controllable force.

“Try again,” Elle instructed in her East African accent.

We replaced the saddle pad, and I signaled him forward with an upbeat “and, walk!” cue and stepped forward. We walked along, and slowly Hope began to pull the saddle pad off, this time in her direction. It eventually fell to the ground and we immediately halted. Farasi startled slightly but did not spook outright, thankfully avoiding a collision with Hope.

“Let’s be done with that,” Elle said. “Let’s go back to walking him through the maze.”

Hope walks into the barn to put the saddle pad away while I stand with Farasi. She reemerges and grabs one of the long white sticks, coming to stand on the same side as me, positioned at his hindquarters. I keep the stick I am holding at his chest, standing on his left side.

“And walk!” I say, stepping and motioning him forward with the wand. At the same time, Hope steps forward and taps him on the rump with the wand she is holding. We stop and start a couple of different times before maneuvering the young horse through a maze of poles on the ground. It requires him to turn left and right at ninety-degree angles, an exercise that demands patience. Unfortunately, this colt is limited in that regard, and he rushes forward to go over the poles rather than bending around them. I sigh in frustration and we turn around at the end of the maze to come at it from the other side. Hope and I make him stop at each turn in the maze, and eventually, he makes it through correctly.

Elle comes up to us, mouth a straight line.

“He isn’t paying attention at all,” she says with disappointment. Throughout the entire training session, the moments where the colt was focused on us were few and far between. His eyes and ears signaled he was looking elsewhere, simply going through the motions of the exercises as opposed to absorbing what he was learning. His ears were turning every which way, eyes looking anywhere but the two people working with him.

“I think he’s going to be done this week,” Elle continued. “It isn’t safe to back him.”

While the other four-year-olds we were working with that week would be backed and begin their under-saddle training, Farasi would not be. It is important that experiences are very positive for these young horses, and you want the backing process to go well. Farasi was not ready, and trying to push it would more than likely result in rider injury and would make Farasi that much harder to train.

Back in Oklahoma, I was working with a bay thoroughbred-Connemara mare named Windy. She was a new addition to the barn and while she was 19 years old, she acted like she

was four. Mary called her “the oldest green horse” for how nervous she was. She could barely stand to be tacked up, breaking the cross ties multiple times and once even pulling completely out of her halter and running loose out of the barn. Due to this, and many other facets of her personality, I was one of the few people able to work with her. I had ridden her a couple of times, each ride before this going surprisingly well. However, this day was different.

I tacked up Windy like normal and led her from the barn to the indoor arena. We walked together around the arena a few times, getting her to relax a little before I led her to the mounting block. Mary came up next to me and held Windy by her bridle, keeping her still while I got on. I stepped up to the block, feeling how tense Windy had become. I softly placed my foot in the stirrup, lifting my other leg off of the mounting block so my body weight was resting over the saddle. Mary continued to hold Windy, watching both her and me. I stayed there for a second, not swinging my right leg over to the other side, before gently coming back down to stand on the mounting block. I liked to use this tactic with more nervous horses or green horses to see how they would react to a person’s weight on them, as it both allows me to get down safely if something were to go wrong and helps them know that someone is about to mount up. I gave Windy some pats before I reached my left leg up again to put my foot in the stirrup, aiming to fully mount up this time.

“Wait,” Mary said, slicing through the quiet arena.

I stepped back down so both of my feet were on the mounting block again.

“I don’t like her eye,” she continued.

I didn’t ask her to elaborate, I could see what she meant. Instead, I nodded and stepped off of the block completely, taking Windy back to the barn to untack her.

When I had gone to get on, you could see the whites of her eyes. This is a dangerous sign, signaling that the horse is scared, nervous, or some other emotion that could put both horse and rider in danger if they were to act on it. While some riders may have continued to get on and ride out whatever the mare had been feeling, I was not raised with that riding or training philosophy. I had been taught that experiences, for both horse and rider, should be positive and cooperative. While one should not ride in fear, it is important to acknowledge that a horse can kill you, no matter how strong a person thinks they are. When you give control to a 1500-pound animal, you assume that risk. In the same way that I believe riders should not ride in fear, I also believe that the horse should not be ridden in fear. There is a difference between working through spooking or nervousness with a horse and having the entire experience be filled with fear.

At this moment, my training philosophy is to do more groundwork: working with Windy on the lunge line, lead rope, and liberty work. This allows for both of us to be more comfortable with each other, helps to prepare Windy with more training, and helps her relax and get used to both me and the environment. This will then allow us to have better communication with each other so that she is not so wound up, so I can help her relax if she does get wound up, and so we have a better partnership overall.

These experiences display instances of when a person read a horse's body language and determined that proceeding with training would be an unwise and unsafe decision. These decisions were made based on the person's ability to read and decode the horse's messages, understanding the message that was being transmitted, and making a decision based on the given information. These decisions are also made with empathy, which is the ability of a person to truly understand the horse and what they are feeling. In these cases, both horses were feeling scared or

unsure and were not in a receptive mental place, and the people in charge read those messages, understood them, and did not force the horses to continue to push themselves. Had these situations been approached without empathy, the horse's attempts to communicate may have been ignored and they would have been pushed to continue with the training exercise.

This idea of empathy in equine communication expands Malinowski's idea of phatic communion, introduced in Chapter 5, which brings forth the idea that language has the ability to create personal bonds. These personal bonds then increase the presence of empathy within the relationship. This framework is then able to be applied to multispecies communication through the idea of bond-forging language. As a person begins to understand the language of another species, they are then able to develop a closer relationship with those individuals and empathize with each other. This relationship and empathy is not one-sided, where only a human is able to feel those things, but instead envelopes all entities in the communicative system.

One rainy day in Wyoming, while the wranglers were all in the barn cleaning tack, Ava told us the story of how she had decided to purchase her mare.

"I went to another barn to go try her out [before I bought her]. She went and bucked me off four times that day. But each time I fell, she would immediately stop and come check on me. She would turn around and nudge me with her nose. That's why I bought her."

Some horses, when a rider falls, will take off running. When Ava's mare went and checked on her, that showed that the mare had an understanding of what had just happened, that she respected Ava as a person, and that she was able to feel and transmit empathy towards Ava for bucking her off. Explicit words were not exchanged between Ava and her mare, but the mare

was able to silently communicate (by checking on her and nudging her) in a way that facilitated the creation and strengthening of a personal bond between the two.

The idea of empathy in multispecies communication challenges previous anthropocentric ideas which held that animals do not have souls or are placed on a lower existence than humans. One of the strongest champions of these anthropocentric ideas is René Descartes, who describes animals as machines who “[do] not act consciously, but only because their organs were disposed in a certain way,” (Descartes 2006, 47). This language asserts that animals are lesser than humans, and calling them machines provokes the idea that animals aren’t living beings. It also assumes that animals are unable to make spontaneous decisions and that they do not have a conscience at all. Descartes continues with these anthropocentric ideas by stating that not only do “animals have less reason than man, but that they have none at all” (Descartes 2006, 47). Descartes then continues, arguing that “there is none which causes weak minds to stray more readily from the narrow path of virtue than that of imagining that the souls of animals are of the same nature as our own...” (Descartes 2006, 48). In this case, not only is Descartes insulting all non-human entities, but is also insulting those who believe animals do have souls, rational thought, and consciousness. Despite this insult, the entirety of the second half of my thesis goes against Descartes’ beliefs. In order to have empathy, the entities involved must place each other on a level playing field. If one entity believes they are inherently above or more important than the other, they will be unable to truly empathize with the other. Since empathy has been demonstrated in human-equine communications, this means that inequality is mitigated. Furthermore, since empathy has been demonstrated by both horse and rider, the horse is shown to be capable of reasoning and of having a conscience.

The ability of the horse to produce, and act on, rational thought is also demonstrated in the situation where the horses do not run from the rain, but instead maintain a steady presence and turn their faces from the rain. This is also demonstrated when Tundra resists his natural herd instinct and continues to follow my directions, listen, and stay calm when Aurora is running away with Ivan on her back. He is able to think about what I am asking and listen to those cues, as opposed to blindly following his instincts. While some may call this well-trained, I believe it demonstrates the partnership between horse and rider and highlights the intellectual capabilities of non-human species.

These intellectual capabilities are not reserved simply for equine species but go across species as well. One example of this is observed in elephants in regard to their mourning practices. In one herd, when an older matron elephant died, “a younger female was walking in circles around the carcass” (Preston 2022). The presence of fresh fecal piles also suggested that other elephants in the herd had visited the body as well. There are multiple other instances of elephants responding to death, including instances when female elephants “used their trunks to carry calves, or baby elephants, that had died” (Preston 2022). What this shows is that elephants understand death, and the grieving process is a display of empathy. This combats Descartes' arguments, as grieving does not appear to serve a biological need or aid in the survival of a species, meaning that the presence of mourning displays a higher level of thinking and consciousness than Descartes believes animals are capable of.

Empathy is not uniquely human and is an essential component for successful communication across species. The idea that non-human species have empathy directly challenges anthropocentric ideas, including those by Descartes who maintained animals did not have consciousness, no ability to reason, and did not have souls comparable to humans. These

ideas are directly challenged through detailed experiences of scientists and myself through descriptions of mourning in elephant species, experiences with horses that display in-depth thinking and empathy, and communication between humans and non-human species.

9. CONCLUSION

This thesis is based on the findings of my Summer 2023 fieldwork in Wyoming, and my focus just scratches the surface of the possibilities that this fieldwork could bring. Despite trends in anthropology that push scholars outside of the United States or to vulnerable communities, I believe that more scholarship should be done in areas such as this. There are many possibilities for fieldwork within the United States and with non-vulnerable populations that are of no less value than fieldwork that does involve those. Arable land, land that is fit to cultivate, is disappearing; farmland is disappearing; ranches and family farms are disappearing. I caution those who believe that this is not a major concern, and I want to emphasize the importance of working with sites and communities that are not as popular in anthropology. While the volatility of American ranches was not a focus of my thesis, it did provide motivation for going to that field site in the first place.

For the research I did, there are a few things I would do differently if I approached this kind of research again. I would make more of an effort to interview and include the owners of the Ranch, and I would also try to include some interviews with guests so that their viewpoints could be included. I was limited from doing this in part due to my IRB submission and approval, so in the future, I would try to make my submission broader to anticipate the possibilities of expanding my participants. I think I would also include more informal interviews with the wranglers- my

attempts to do so did not render much data at all- so I would adjust my approach in the future to perhaps gain more insight into what they were thinking. There are many other suggestions and possibilities for future research. How horses react to a rider's gender and voice/register; how multispecies ideology could connect to animacy hierarchies and if there are social implications of these linguistic hierarchy; the various agrarian practices and ontologies that exist, how they are utilized or viewed, and what these look like; and animal metaphors as they relate to ideology about more-than-human species.

I also want to acknowledge the lack of Shoshone perspective in this ethnography. This was brought on due to multiple factors: time constraints, IRB constraints, and social constraints. I was unable to find evidence for the Shoshone viewpoint, and was cautious about using third-party-sources due to the divide between the Eastern and Western Shoshone. I wanted to be sure I would be able to represent the Shoshone of the Wind River appropriately, and, as such, I found I could not with the information and sources I found. However, I want to emphasize how obtaining this viewpoint is crucial, and should I continue this research in the future I would make representing these complex viewpoints a priority.

Prior to my arrival at the Ranch, I had anticipated that I would be studying sociolinguistics as it relates to language and gender, specifically with how the majority-female wrangler team communicates and develops language together. This ended up not being the case for a multitude of reasons: wranglers would have incredibly limited communication with each other due to a focus on the guests and that wranglers would often be separated by a group of guests that would sometimes even prevent the wranglers from seeing each other clearly, much less communicating. I had also told my participants that I would not record any data when someone had been drinking alcohol, which prevented the recording and writing of any

observations when the group of wranglers was together during and after dinner. In future research, I think the gender dynamics of ranch workers would be incredibly valuable and interesting to study. Despite these afterthoughts, the focus and analysis of my thesis are not any less valuable.

Part one was centered around oral narratives. This discussion was framed by several concepts: Bakhtin's chronotope, performance, register, Malinowski's phatic communion, mythologization, and erasure. When recounting the various trails, Bakhtin's chronotope helped to frame the discussion of space and time. This discussion was further framed by the idea that "senses of place also partake of cultures, of shared bodies of 'local knowledge' with which persons and whole communities render their places meaningful and endow them with social importance" (Basso 1996, xiv). While the wrangler's sense of place was not the same as the Western Apache, certain spaces were deemed to have greater social importance than others. With regard to narratives, this was with the red gate, the old homestead cabin of the Old Lady's story, and other older structures that the trails would encounter.

The analysis of oral narratives shared by the wranglers was framed by the concept of oral narrative performance, also known as storytelling. Performance then allowed for an analysis of the narrative event, which is when the wrangler shares the narrative with the guests to add more depth to their experience and understanding of the area and its people. Bauman's ideas on performance frame this analysis, and in doing so drives the identification of concepts that are relevant to that particular performance. This is intertwined with a discussion on register, enregisterment, and socialization that is driven by Agha. Here, I introduced the concept of the customer service register, a way of speaking that is learned through employment in customer

service roles. This description was encompassed by the concept of enregisterment, which is when particular language features become attributed towards a particular user group (Agha 2005, 38). This was accompanied by the concept of socialization, which is the process of acquiring a particular register. I then displayed how that register was used during the performance of oral narratives, and brought Gricean maxims into the discussion to show how the register was felicitous when the wrangler was speaking to guests, but infelicitous when sharing stories with other employees.

Chapter 5, *Colorful Language*, continued this discussion while on the topic of swear words. In the first paragraph, the description of how my own vocabulary changed further drew on the concept of socialization. In a new environment, one less formal than an academic institution (my old environment), with a new group of individuals, I began to pick up on the language that was used. My personal ideas relaxed where I put less pressure on myself to uphold an academia-centered image and focused more on responding, adapting, and fitting into the new social setting I was researching. Swear words also have the ability to act as a coping strategy in response to pain or frustration, an ability asserted by Stephens (2018; 2020). The discussion on swear words was also further framed by Malinowski's idea of phatic communion: the ability of language to form social bonds. Using swear words promoted closer social relationships with the other wranglers and increased the possibility of empathy in certain situations- the example used being when I had a tick attached to my shoulder and was assisted by Hope in removing it.

To reiterate, the customer service register and my increased use of swear words were not explicitly taught. As Ochs (2012) points out, while language socialization can be explicitly taught, it is instead generally undergone through “participation in semiotically mediated practices... cuing them as to how they should initiate moves and interpret and respond to

situational contingencies” (Ochs 2012, 12). This helps to frame the discussion by introducing the social bonds formed while acquiring a language or register, something that the discussion of phatic communion and empathy can build off of.

Mythologization, erasure, and romanticization are a large focus of Part One, intertwined with the narratives about the Shoshone Tribe and the experience of the guests at the Ranch. The chapter titled ‘Behind the Bench’ introduced this discussion through the Crowheart story, a story that introduced Shoshone Chief Washakie through his victory atop Crowheart Butte against the Crow Chief at the time. Despite differing versions of the Crowheart story, the narrative that the wranglers tell praises Washakie’s foresight and wisdom, citing the many years that he was Chief, his relationship with the United States Government, and the large size of the Wind River Reservation that he was able to negotiate. While these narratives are aimed to enhance the guest’s experience at the Ranch, they promote a sanitized history of the American West that mythologizes Indigenous peoples and leads to an erasure of their histories, contributions, and hardships. In short, there are many aspects of the experience that had been romanticized: caring and raising livestock, indigenous histories, histories of the American West, and communication between humans and horses.

The Crowheart story mythologizes Chief Washakie by describing him, and the events of the story, as legendary. While the story could be considered a myth, and Chief Washakie was considered a great Chief, the narrative causes all of the actors to be mythologized, meaning that someone or something is described as being so heroic or legendary that they become a myth. While myths are often shared within a culture through narrative storytelling, this story is being told to those who often have little-to-no experience with the Shoshone people. When all actors in the story are mythologized, people can forget that the story involves real individuals, which

encourages a romanticized view of Indigenous peoples as a whole. Consequences of this mythologization and romanticization include erasure, where real-life contributions, histories, cultures, and peoples are removed from memory or record.

The narratives the guests are told about the Shoshone tribe are also sanitized and leave out mentions of the injustices and hardships that the tribe faced in the past, and continues to face today. There is no mention of the prevalence of white-owned cattle and settlements on the Wind River Reservation, of disease that devastated over ten percent of the population in fifteen years (Stamm 1999, 238), of the boarding schools that Indigenous children were subjected to, or of the history and consequences of uranium mining on the Reservation. The omission of these injustices presents a sanitized version of Indigenous histories and the American West, leading guests to have a false understanding of the past. Without an awareness of these injustices, it becomes increasingly more difficult to prevent the cycle of harm from continuing; a cycle of harm that glosses over the contributions and histories of Indigenous peoples, hiding them from memory.

This sanitization of history is continued with the Old Lady's narrative, where the difficulties of being a settler in the late 1800s to early 1900s are simplified and veiled over. The harsh reality of the climate and environment is simplified to focus on the remoteness of the location, omitting the harsh winters, droughts, and floods. There is also no mention of the social climate at the time, meaning that the conflict between cattle ranchers and sheep farmers is left out. While the focus of the story is on the woman who resided in the cabin and not the social or physical climate, the narrative presents a simplified, sanitized version of the American West. This conceals the true histories of the area, including the complexities of what life was like, and the tenacity and grit that was needed to survive at the time.

This idea is further supported by the dichotomy between guest and employee experience where guests are given a cleaned-up experience of ranching. Many times, guests had a lack of awareness regarding space or situation, as shown in Chapter 5 with the guest needing a picture during a hail storm, the guest asking for the skull of the dead foal, or the parents who brought their incredibly young children to the Wyoming backcountry. Regardless of the weather, it was the job of the wranglers to care for the horses, get them ready for the guests to ride, and complete other jobs around the Ranch. When this was going on, guests would be in the heated Lodge enjoying cocktail hour or a meal, back at their cabins, or going on walks around the Ranch. The guests paid for this experience, so, naturally, they would not have to work, and the fact that they did not have to do this is not a bad thing. However, this set up the guests not realizing the work that goes into their experience: going on rides, running a ranch, caring for livestock, etc. This gives them a romanticized experience that downplays the persistence and hard work employees needed to keep the Ranch running and provide a good experience for the guests.

Similarly, the oral narratives presented to the guests are not inherently negative entities, despite their sanitized presentation and promotion of romanticized and mythologized ideas. The Ranch, being a place for guests (tourists) to come and visit, falls into the category of tourism. Smith (1971) further divides tourism into different categories, with dude ranching falling into three of them. One of these categories is environmental tourism, where the focus is on the unique geography of the area. The Ranch falls into this category by taking the guests on horseback to see the mountains and forests of Wyoming, which also allows for a unique visual experience. On horseback, riders can travel farther and faster than if they were on foot, and can navigate trickier environments better than on a four-wheeler/ATV or other motorized vehicle. Seeing the land on horseback also allows for less disruption to the environment than a motorized vehicle, increasing

the likelihood of guests seeing wild animals such as Rocky Mountain elk, Pronghorn antelope, bears, and wild horses. The Ranch also falls into the category of historical tourism through the display of historic structures such as the late-1800s homestead cabin from the Old Lady's story, or a hideout of Butch Cassidy, an outlaw in the late 1800s. Sharing narratives from the past also falls into this category. Lastly, the Ranch falls into the category of cultural tourism, characterized by its display of "a vestige of a vanishing life-style that lies within human memory" (Smith 1971, 4). This is perhaps the most prominent category of tourism that dude ranching falls into, giving guests a glimpse into what life is like on a ranch in the American West. With individuals spending the time and money to have this experience, it would make sense that decisions are made on the Ranch with the idea that the guest experience comes first. Naturally, this could not occur with *all* decisions made, since it is still a working ranch, but this may have something to do with the narratives that are shared with the guests. Meaning, the sanitization that is perpetuated by the narratives may not be due to ignorance or malice, but may instead be a facet of the hospitality mindset. The wranglers are encouraged to share these stories to fill time on rides, give them new information, and help enrich the guest's experience overall. The shared narratives are exciting and intriguing to the majority of guests, and that could disappear if the "entire" story was shared. Additionally, the guests may even feel guilty: guilty for riding through the Wind River Reservation, for not caring for the horses or tacking them up, or for going on a vacation that requires employees to perform manual labor. This could dampen their experience and could begin to harm the Ranch if tourists no longer want to come stay and pay for the experience. While I do think it is incredibly important to bring awareness to the harm that these narratives could perpetuate, I do not think it is appropriate to vilify those who are sharing them or to begin sharing the entire picture. Opposite, the slight mention of Indigenous peoples, injustices, or

difficulties of life in the American West does not warrant fanfare or celebration. Overall, this situation is incredibly complex and warrants further discussion.

Part Two focused on multispecies communication and continued on the common threads of empathy and romanticization. Empathy was discussed as it related to communication and understanding, first being introduced in Part One with Malinowski's concept of phatic communion and how it promotes empathy. Part Two used this concept to frame the idea of empathy in equine-human communication with the idea that learning the language of another species builds personal bonds between the different entities and allows for the entities to empathize with each other. This idea, along with the examples of empathy in human-equine communication, was used in conjunction with descriptions of the mourning practices of elephants to combat anthropocentric ideas championed by Descartes (2006).

The second section began with descriptions of ways humans communicate with horses: pressure and release, body language, voice, and emotion. Each facet has its complexities, just as every human and horse have their own preferences. However, the threads of romanticization introduced in Part One continue throughout this as well, tying in with how the guests experience riding a horse. Guests are taught that all of the horses on the Ranch are to be ridden with a loose rein and little leg contact, a style that is ideal for those who have little to no experience with horses. This style teaches guests a small snippet of how to communicate with a horse but does not teach them the full breadth of the language. They are given a simplified version that masks the intricacies and complexities of human-horse communication. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it romanticizes the act of riding a horse and simplifies it in a way that masks the depth of the language, romanticizing the language as well. Ultimately, the language between humans

and horses rests on trust, but there are many more aspects to the language that add to its complexity.

This brings in ideology, the concept that helped frame the analysis of multispecies communication. Hauck (2016) was used to introduce this concept, and Duranti (1997) was used to build on the discussion of *what is language*. The language between horses and humans should not be modeled off of traditional aspects of theoretical linguistics such as syntax and morphology but rather should be based on how the language has evolved, how it is embodied, and how it is experienced.

The concept of embodied and experienced language wraps back to the methodology used in my fieldwork, the Rubber Boots method. This method introduces the idea that fieldwork is not just “about” but is also “with” (Cypher 2022). This idea, despite being from a different school of thought in regard to multispecies ethnography, ties into Kohn (2013) which combats anthropocentrism by asserting that thinking is not reserved to only humans. This theme of “with” continues throughout Part Two, resting on trust, the foundation of human-horse communication. Throughout this exploration, the idea of *what it means to be human* is renegotiated as previously held anthropocentric standards of humanism are challenged and broken down. This wraps back to empathy, a concept that is vital for successful communication within and across species.

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