

An Exploratory Study of Dog Owners' Experiences in Nature

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of individuals who spend time in nature with their dogs. The study was guided by three key research questions: what is the essence of the experience; how does time in nature with a dog differ from time in nature without a dog; and what are the outcomes of spending time in nature with a dog? Eight participants who spent at least six hours a week in nature with their dog were interviewed. Transcripts were analyzed and coded. Three overall themes (heightened experience, negotiating constraints, and outcomes) emerged, which informed the three research questions. This study connected two related research areas, adding to existing literature on dog ownership and nature experiences.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

General Introduction

Individuals have been documenting the psychological advantages of nature for hundreds of years (McDonald, Wearing, & Ponting, 2009; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan, 1995; Garg, Couture, Ogryzlo, & Schinke, 2010). Western artists such as William Wordsworth and John Keats popularized the spiritual, restorative, and health giving benefits of natural settings throughout the 18th and 19th centuries (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1998). In Canada, artists such as the group of seven painted natural landscapes, promoting a new appreciation for the physical, aesthetic, and spiritual values of Canadian Wilderness (Cole, 1978).

Exposure to natural environments is beneficial to many aspects of health, including increases to emotional and mental wellbeing and contributing to the reduction of stress (Hinds & Sparks, 2009). Individuals that have spent time in wild environments often cite feeling restored, and more aware of their surroundings (McDonald, Wearing, & Ponting, 2009). As well as influencing psychological health, nature has a positive effect on physical health. There is a positive relationship between outdoor activity and overall physical activity levels (Sharma-Brymer & Bland, 2006). When individuals have access to natural environments, they are more likely to participate in physical activity; being outdoors can result in more functional physical development than indoor pursuits (Calogiuri, 2015). Along with correlations to physical health, having a relationship with nature can be beneficial for social and spiritual connectedness (Irvine, Warber, Devine-Wright, & Gaston,

2013). Individuals have documented that they feel more connected to others in natural environments, and that they feel connected to the space itself (McDonald, Wearing, & Ponting, 2009). Wilderness experiences are both significant and meaningful to participants.

The documentation of human-canine relationships dates back further than the evidence of the restorative effects of nature; human societies have kept dogs as pets for over 14,000 years (Serpell, 2002). Growing evidence suggests that dog owners experience improved physical, mental, and emotional health (Allen, 1997). In health promotion literature, dog walking is receiving increasing notice as an approach to improve individuals' physical activity levels (Wharf Higgins, Temple, Murray, Kumm, & Rhodes, 2013). Dog owners walk an average of 1.6 times more than non-dog owners (Richards, McDonough, Edwards, Lyle, & Troped, 2013). Additionally, dog walking tends to be less seasonal than many other outdoor activities. One study showed that dog owners use park space and nature even during inclement weather periods (Rhodes, Murray, Temple, Tuokko, & Wharf Higgins, 2012). Dogs motivate physical activity through a variety of correlates, including obligation, motivation and companionship (Brown & Rhodes, 2006). Many of the psychosocial health benefits of dog ownership are a product of companionship. In fact, the relationship between a person and their dog can transcend the human and non-human distinction, and people refer to their dog as a soul mate (Wharf Higgins et al., 2013).

While there is a great deal of research on the benefits of both time spent in nature and dog ownership, there is little research that links these two literature sets together. The resulting impact of each research body is strikingly similar; however, not much is known

about how or if these variables interact. Therefore this study will take exploratory steps to help bring the benefits of dog ownership and nature together.

Purpose Statement

The general goal of this study was to explore the experiences of individuals who spend time in nature with their dogs. Widespread literature exists regarding the experiences of people in nature, and the experiences of individuals spending time with dogs; however, these research bodies tend to focus on the variables independently. Because outcomes of the research are similar (mental, physical, social, and emotional benefits), they may interrelate to create increased outcomes. This study will explore the practice of connecting to nature with a dog, through interviewing nature-using dog owners. Authors of studies focusing on nature connectedness and dog ownership have indicated that more research is needed in order to provide rich and meaningful data, and to further investigate these evolving topics (Hinds & Sparks, 2009; Wharf Higgins et al., 2013; Lim & Rhodes, 2016).

In order to aim for rich, meaningful data and to understand the nature of the experience from the dog owner's perspective, this study will use in-depth, qualitative interviews. Further discussion of the methods and research processes will be found in Chapter 3.

Research Questions

A research question needs to be focused, clear and central to research. These questions are open-ended and call for views that are supplied by the participants (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). Strong research questions help academics focus their ideas by providing a structural dimension to the research and writing process. The following questions were used to provide a guide to explore the experience of dog owners in nature.

1. What is the essence of the experience of spending time in nature with one's dog?
2. How is your nature experience different when you have your dog with you, as compared to when you do not?
3. How does spending time in nature with your dog contribute to your overall wellness?

Operational Definitions

According to McDonald, Wearing, & Ponting (2009), *wilderness* is a Western concept. It applies to a large area of uninhabited land that contains native plant and animal communities and is relatively unaltered or unaffected by human society. The wilderness does not contain permanent human-made objects or structures. By nature, wilderness should be somewhat hard to get to, difficult to travel through, and possess certain rugged characteristics (Frederickson & Anderson, 1999). Wilderness locations do not allow the use of mechanical transport, including: motor vehicles or powerboats. Throughout this study, the terms *nature*, *wild spaces*, and *wilderness* aligned with this definitions. In this context, nature must have a certain degree of wildness.

Throughout this study, a person's *Relationship with Nature* was discussed. This referred to the feelings and emotions that one experiences in connection to their natural, wild surroundings.

As well as describing a person's relationship with nature, the study used the term *Nature User* to describe an individual who engages in at least 6 hours per week. These sessions were required to be in a *wilderness* setting, and the time commitment ensured that individuals were more than simply weekend hikers.

As defined by the World Health Organization, *health* is not “merely the absence of disease or infirmity, but a [holistic] state of physical, mental, social, and spiritual wellbeing” (WHO, 2018).

Wellness was defined as an individual taking steps to prevent illness and live to one’s personal potential. According to Hettler’s wellness model, the six dimensions of wellness are: intellectual, emotional, occupational, spiritual, social, and physical (Hettler, 1976). Considering this model, a person who is well is aware of the interconnectedness of each dimension of wellness and how they contribute to healthy living.

Finally, the study focused on dogs spending time with human companions in nature. These dogs were referred to as *Adventure Dogs*, and were defined as: A dog that is capable of hiking and participating in all nature sessions with a nature user in an off-leash capacity. Adventure dogs are not limited by size or breed, but defined through their capability in wilderness settings. The size of a dog is not necessarily related to walking behaviours (Brown & Rhodes, 2006).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Spending time in wild spaces benefits the health and wellness of a population (Louv, 2008). Tucker, Norton, DeMille, and Hobson (2016) found that wilderness therapy could be a promising intervention for individuals struggling with health issues. Wilderness therapy is a growing field of mental health care using a combination of outdoor modalities and therapeutic intervention (Tucker et al., 2016). Yet, despite the clear benefits of active time in nature, the trend in North America has substantially shifted towards a more sedentary, indoor lifestyle (McCurdy, Winterbottom, Mehta, & Roberts, 2010). Less than 13 % of Canadians reach the nationally recommended guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week (Toohey & Rock, 2011). The most common barriers to general physical activity listed by individuals are: a lack of time and skill, lack of motivation, low social support, high cost of activities, poor health, old age, and poor weather (Chinn, White, Howell, Harland, & Drinkwater, 2006).

Even though nature is a vital health resource, it is clearly underutilized (Maller, Townsend, Pryor, Brown, & St Leger, 2006). Participation in nature activities improves emotional wellbeing because natural environments may lessen the impacts of stress, resulting in a decrease of both anxiety and depression (Tucker et al., 2016). Nature is beneficial to people of all ages (Garg et al., 2010). It can provide a restorative environment, inspiring play, fascination, and a sense of being away from it all (Maller et al., 2006; Warber, Dehudy, Bialko, Marselle, & Irvine, 2015; Hartig, Mang, & Evans, 1991). The restorative benefits of nature go beyond the experience; individuals are able to transfer

outcomes from wilderness experiences to their work and family lives (Holman & McAvoy, 2005).

The literature on dog ownership shows similar health outcomes to nature research. The benefits of dog ownership are widely documented and include positive effects on physical and mental wellbeing, family structure, and social development (Flint, Minot, Perry, & Stafford, 2010; Knight & Edwards, 2008; Cutt, Giles-Corti, & Knuiman, 2007; Schofield, Mummery, & Steele, 2005). Evidence consistently suggests that dog owners are more physically active than non-dog owners, and that dog walking is positively associated with meeting physical activity recommendations (Richards et al., 2013; Cutt et al., 2007; Christian et al., 2013; Salmon et al., 2010; Hoerster, Mayer, Sallis, Pizi, Talley, Pichon, & Butler, 2011). As well as improving physical activity levels, dogs positively impact their owners both socially and mentally. Dog owners often report that their dog helps to break down social barriers with others, and it is easier to make community connections when they have a dog (Wharf Higgins et al., 2013).

Health Benefits of Nature

Wilderness environments provide individuals with mental health benefits, social improvements, spiritual outlets and positive physical health. Natural settings are often associated with mental restoration (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). This restorative appeal has positive implications in reducing stress levels. The wilderness provides individuals with the feeling of being away, and able to escape the pressures of day-to-day life (Kaplan, 1995). Moreover, research indicates that natural settings are a common trigger for peak experiences, which can help to shape a person's motivation and goals (Williams, Weston,

Henry, & Maguire, 2009). Peak experiences describe moments of fulfillment that carry meaning (McDonald, Wearing, & Ponting, 2009). Nature can be considered to be a therapeutic space. Simply viewing the wilderness may promote human health and wellbeing (Hofmann, Young, Binz, Baumgartner, & Bauer, 2018); landscapes have the potential to promote wellbeing through stress reduction and the evocation of positive emotions (Abraham, Sommerhalder, & Abel, 2010; Bell, Phoenix, Lovell, & Wheeler, 2015). Van Brunt (2010) states that nature is restorative because it is a setting where individuals can be themselves, and just be.

As well as providing health benefits, nature is conducive to positive social connection (Hartig, Van den Berg, Hagerhall, Tomalak, Hansmann, & Bell, 2010). Groups partaking in nature experiences felt that the environment facilitated social connections (Warber et al., 2015). Groups that participate in outdoor activities together report that they feel more attached to others, as opposed to those that participate in indoor activities (Irvine et al., 2013). As well as connecting to other people, individuals have a tendency to unite with nature itself. The importance of environmental connection can be connected to metaphors referring to nature as a home or mother figure (Thibodeau, Frantz, and Beretta, 2017). In summary, nature provides an environment where individuals feel strengthened social connection to each other, and to the space around them.

Along with creating a space for individuals to develop socially, outdoor space can also be seen as a spiritual outlet. Spirituality provides people with perspective on life, gives individuals the idea of purpose, and often promotes a belief that all life is sacred (White & Hendee, 2000; Elkins et al., 1998). Research has shown that the wilderness is conducive to

spiritual expression (McDonald, Wearing, & Ponting, 2009). In the outdoors, individuals are reminded of the sheer power of nature, which leads to moments of reverence and wonder (Frederickson & Anderson, 1999). These times can help provide people with the space to consider dimensions of spirituality (McDonald, Wearing, & Ponting, 2009).

Finally, time spent in nature positively correlates with increased physical health (Pretty, 2004; Miles, 1987; Russell et al., 2013). People that spend time in nature have fewer health issues, and a decreased risk of chronic health issues (Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin, 2006). As well as reducing risk of disease, there is a positive correlation between people that spend time in nature and physical activity levels (Sharma-Brymer & Bland, 2016). Participation in regular, moderate-intensity, physical activity is associated with important health benefits. These benefits include: weight management, decreased risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes, reduced blood pressure, and a decrease in musculoskeletal pain (Hoerster et al., 2011). Research has shown that outdoor activity can additionally aid in muscle development and physical literacy (Louv, 2008). All in all, nature is very important to human health in many different dimensions.

Health Consequences of Nature

While the benefits of nature are widely documented, there are negative outcomes of spending time outdoors. Individuals can experience feelings of fear and uncertainty when being exposed to wilderness settings (Bixler & Floyd, 1997). Wilderness is often associated with feelings of terror and fear of death (Koole & Van den Berg, 2005). Additionally, when people spend time alone outdoors, these feelings can be amplified causing anxiety and panic (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Individuals who have had a fearful experience in nature

often respond to nature with negative emotions and avoidance tendencies (Van den Berg & Ter Heijne, 2005). These negative emotions reflect the unpredictability of the natural environment, which creates overwhelming and disorienting situations (Bixler & Floyd, 1997).

Because nature can be difficult to access, there are not equal opportunities for people of diverse backgrounds and abilities to experience the outdoors (Taylor, Wiley, Kuo, & Sullivan, 1998). Race, ethnicity, immigrant status, and ability level were negatively correlated with wild land visitation (Bowker, Murphy, Cordell, English, Bergstrom, Starbuck, & Green, 2006). It is suggested that this inequity in access is due to limitations in transport and housing proximity to wilderness locations (Bowker et al., 2006). Taking part in outdoor physical activity requires a certain level of training and knowledge (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). The need for training and experience in nature should not be taken lightly; nature can be unsafe and individuals need to manage risks carefully. Through proper education and training, most adverse feelings about the outdoors can be managed.

Health Benefits of Dog Ownership

Like wilderness environments, dog ownership leads to health benefits in many different dimensions (Cutt et al., 2007; Westgarth, Christley, & Christian, 2016; Knight & Edwards, 2008). Dog owners are reported to have increased physical, mental, and social health (Knight & Edwards, 2008). As previously discussed, physical activity is very important to human health, and individuals who own a dog engage in more walking and physical activity than non-dog owners (Christian et al., 2013).

A 2016 study reported that approximately one third of Canadian households have a pet dog and many more individuals have regular contact with a canine companion (McCormack, Graham, Christian, Toohey, & Rock, 2016). Evidence suggests that dog owners are more active than non-dog owners; however, not all dog owners walk their dogs (Westgarth, Christley & Christian, 2014). Individuals that do exercise with their pet, generally describe obtaining motivation from their dog. Brown and Rhodes (2006) found that an owner's obligation to their dog significantly related to dog walking frequency. This result has been echoed in other studies, finding that the dog itself provides walking incentive to the owner (Lim & Rhodes, 2016; Johnson & Meadows, 2010). Dog owners, especially with athletic or hunting dog breeds, feel that the dog needs to walk or run, and that it would be unfair to be sedentary with their pet (McCormack et al., 2016). As well as feeling compelled by a duty, dog owners often engage in physical activity because they are inspired by their pet (Rhodes, Murray, Temple, Tuokko, & Wharf Higgins, 2012). The energy and excitement that a dog shows towards walking positively influences the owner to feel excited as well (Johnson & Meadows, 2010; Lim & Rhodes, 2016; Wharf Higgins et al., 2013).

Inclement weather negatively correlates with physical activity; however, dog walkers tend to be less dependent on good weather than non-dog walking walkers (Wharf Higgins et al., 2013). Lail, McCormack, and Rock (2011) found that dog owners walk their dogs at all times of the year, days of the week, temperatures, and weather patterns. As well as promoting physical activity, dogs have a positive effect on human health in terms of preventing illness, and in facilitating recovery (Knight & Edwards, 2008).

Along with physical benefits, dogs provide people with safety and companionship, improving social and mental health. Dogs provide protection to individuals that do not want to come in to contact with others. Many people (especially females) express fear for themselves when out walking (Knight & Edwards, 2008). This fear is generally centered on attacks from strangers, and mistrust of others. Female dog owners perceive themselves to be safer when accompanied by a dog (Christian et al., 2016). Human-dog interactions lead to physiological reactions, such as the releases of serotonin and the reduction of stress (Allen, 1997). These reactions are key to dog walkers feeling more at ease than non-dog walkers.

Finally, dogs can enhance a person's social wellness. There is social element to walking dogs that provides benefit to the walker. Animals serve as social catalyst, and can create opportunities to meet others, providing conversation topics (Knight & Edwards, 2008). Dog owners are found to be more likely than non-dog owners to engage in casual conversations with other community members (Wells, 2004; Wood, Giles-Corti, & Bulsara, 2007). Having a dog can lead to community engagement, and bringing people together in public spaces (Wharf Higgins et al., 2013; Graham & Glover, 2014). Dog parks can serve as community gathering spaces; when dog owners navigate park spaces with their dogs, positive interactions provide opportunities for relationship building (Graham & Glover, 2014).

Health Consequences of Dog Ownership

While there is ample literature that describes the positive effect that dog ownership has for individuals, there are downsides to caring for a pet as well. Due to the time

requirements of dog walking, the commitment can hinder dog owner's personal activity schedules. Wharf Higgins et al. (2013) interviewed participants that admitted their dog walking schedule prohibited them from participating in more vigorous exercise and partaking in activities that did not include the dog. Additionally, dog owners can also be wary of other dogs or wildlife. Some owners found that going to a park was not enjoyable; because they were worried that other animals may injure their pet (Degeling & Rock, 2012).

Dogs can also inhibit physical activity for non-dog owners, under some circumstances. People living in neighbourhoods that have loose or unattended dogs can be less likely to participate in outdoor physical activity. This is related to decreased feelings of safety around unpredictable animals (Toohey and Rock, 2011). Negative past experience with dogs can also create fear or panic towards all dogs and animals.

Finally, dogs can have a negative impact on their owner's social health; how a dog behaves around other dogs and people has implications for the way owners interact: dogs that behave badly can lead to social isolation in community spaces (Graham & Glover, 2014).

Dogs in Nature: A Gap in the Literature

Reviewing the literature for dog ownership and experiences in nature, many of the benefits and consequences are similar. The impact on wellness is nearly identical between the two variables, both potentially influencing multiple dimensions of wellness, including social, physical, emotional, and spiritual (Hettler, 1976). Spending time outdoors, it is common to see individuals hiking with their dogs. This begs the question, how do these

two variables interact with each other? Could walking a dog in nature influence the benefits felt from these activities individually? The researcher was unable to locate any studies that researched the human experience of partaking in wilderness activities with one's dog. This study will look to bring these two topics together, and address the gap in the literature. This research will add depth to the knowledge of nature users and dog owners, by increasing the understanding of the unique experience of interacting with nature with a pet. This is important, as this may have implications such as: assisting with the creation of activity interventions that address constraints or informing studies that research the connection to nature felt by dog owners. The research will additionally add personal stories from nature users. These stories speak to the essence of spending time in wild spaces with their dogs.

Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods used while conducting the study. Qualitative research endeavors to understand and illustrate the depth of a given experience. Creswell et al. (2007) outline that phenomenological researchers study the essence that all persons experience about a phenomenon. This type of research allows a reader to engage with and relate to participants' experiences, and the knowledge drawn from the data contributes to topics that are linked to emotions and authenticity (Lincoln, 1995). Because the essence of spending time in nature with a dog is intertwined with emotion and feeling, qualitative research was chosen as an appropriate method to supplement and support previous research findings on this subject. This research is not looking to confirm or deny previous literature, but to add a deeper meaning to the understanding of how two separate research bodies connect, and add personal voice to the phenomenon of spending time in nature with a dog.

Design

A phenomenological qualitative approach was used, which focused on the stories and lived experiences of participants. This type of study is important, as experiences are valuable and unique, and cannot necessarily be quantified. A descriptive phenomenology collects the views of a number of participants, and describes what the participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007). This research helps illustrate the emotions of a type of experience. The primary purpose of this study was to describe the essence of how people experience the outdoors with a dog. These experiences

were best described through stories and memories, as other methods may not accurately describe 'what was experienced and how they experienced it' (Creswell et al., 2007). Therefore, a phenomenological approach was selected to align with the goals of the research questions.

In collaboration with participants, the researcher leading a phenomenological study collects, reviews, analyzes, and describes information (Groenewald, 2004). To gain a comprehensive understanding of how individuals experience nature with their dogs, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse group of participants. Further sections will give more information about this process.

Qualitative research requires the researcher to be the instrument that gathers and filters data. In this case, the researcher interviewed participants, transcribed interviews, and sorted the transcriptions. The researcher acting as the tool was crucial to the research design. In order to understand the essence of the research topic, it was imperative that the researcher has a connection to the topic. Her theory of knowledge served to decide how the social phenomenon was studied (Creswell et al., 2007). Phenomenologists believe that the researcher cannot be detached from her own beliefs (Groenewald, 2004). Therefore, the researcher could use past beliefs to help her understand the phenomena that was experienced by participants.

Researcher Background

The past experiences and views of the researcher were important in the study. Being an avid nature user and adventure dog owner, the researcher has a close relationship with the subject matter. The researcher took every measure to suppress her bias

throughout data collection and analysis, but assumed that all personal history could not be excluded from a research process. Patton (2002) suggests that a researcher's background and links to research topics is key in creating authentic qualitative studies. The researcher's history may or may not have been excluded from research participants; this information was given on a case-by-case basis. If participants ask the researcher about her own experiences, she did not withhold information; however, she did not begin interviews by explaining her history and feelings toward nature and dog ownership.

Smith and Noble (2014) discuss the idea that new findings cannot be interpreted without a reference to a person's history, and the researcher's connection to wild space may have factored into the interpretation of findings. Because the researcher has a close personal connection to spending time with her dogs in the outdoors, she could better understand the feelings and shared experiences of participants. Although in a traditional sense this could be considered a threat to the validity, it allowed for more authenticity in the stories. Because the researcher had lived similar experience and understood the intricacies of being in wild space with a dog, she could generate a connection with participants and elicit more meaning in the interviews.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

Eight interviews with nature using, adventure-dog owners were included in this study. The sample size was determined by data saturation. Interested participants were asked to contact the researcher after posters (Appendix A) were sent out to dog owners, via a local dog trainer and posted on dog owner Facebook groups. When participants contacted the interviewer, information about the requirements of the study was emailed in a script that

was approved by the Human Research Ethics Board (Appendix B). The message informed participants of the purpose of the study, role of the researcher, time commitment requirements, and research goals. Being an adult nature user and adventure dog owner were a requirement to participate in the study. If participants were still interested after reading the email script, an interview was scheduled.

Remaining consistent with the information presented in the introduction, a typical nature user was described as being an individual who spends at least six hours a week in natural settings. Participants were required to spend at least six hours a week of their wilderness time with their dogs. Participants self identified as adventure dog owners, and were able to partake in outdoor activities with their dog in an off leash capacity. Because the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews in Victoria, BC, all participants were required to live on southern Vancouver Island.

All participants that contacted the researcher and matched the study requirements chose to proceed with the interview process. As per the ethical requirements of the study, completed written informed consent and ongoing consent forms were required from all participants (Appendix C). Participants ranged in age from 20-70, were a mix of genders, and had dogs of varying breeds. Each participant was eager to share their stories of spending time in nature with their dog(s). More information about participants is provided in Chapter 4.

Data Collection

Before any data was collected, the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board granted ethical approval for the study (Appendix E). Data collection occurred between

January 15, 2018 and February 22, 2018. Data was collected using one-on-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. All of the interviews followed the same general format.

Although questions and topics were predetermined, the sequence, wording, and probing used during each interview was flexible to suit each individual participant. Because the interviews were conversational and open-ended, the researcher was able to ensure that topics were fully described and explored before moving on to further questions. When it was apparent that questions had important meaning to participants, the researcher would probe for more information.

Being flexible with the order of questions also allowed participants to speak freely about their experiences with their dogs in nature. If the participant had a particularly passionate narrative about a specific topic, the interviewer would reorder questions to ensure a smooth flow throughout the interview. In addition to asking the scripted open-ended questions, the researcher asked the participants if there was anything they would like to add to their interviews, anything they would like to go over again, or anything significant they felt about spending time in nature with their dog that had been missed.

Interview questions were created to elicit responses that would inform the overall research questions. Certain questions were deemed priority questions, which were crucial to the overall goal of the research. Each participant was asked these questions throughout their interview (Appendix D).

Interview Format

Potential participants contacted the researcher through email, after viewing a poster (Appendix A) that had been sent to clients of a local dog walker and had been posted

to a Dog Owner Facebook group. The researcher then contacted the interested participants with an email script (Appendix B). If the participants felt that they met the requirements of the study and chose to be involved, a consent form (Appendix C) was completed. Once the consent form was completed, a quiet, neutral location was selected for the interview.

Interviews lasted between 20-60 minutes, and were recorded with an audio device. The researcher used a paper list of pre-determined questions for each interview, and wrote handwritten notes on this list. These notes helped the researcher to ensure that all questions were asked, regardless of the flow of the interview. After the interview was completed, participants were reminded of what to expect during upcoming months. It was explained that the interviews would remain confidential, and that no identifying details would be present in the final research. Participants were also briefed that they would receive a copy of their transcript, bio, and themes- to ensure that data accurately reflected the conversation and give them the chance to add any additional thoughts, feelings, or memories to the research.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experience of people spending time in nature with their dogs, and individuals were interviewed until all major data themes throughout interviews started to repeat themselves. Data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate a study, and when additional interviews would not further develop themes (Creswell et al., 2007). It can be a concept that is hard to define, because saturation looks different for each study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation occurred after eight participants were interviewed; at which point,

major themes that were identified were all previously identified in past interviews. Once a point of data saturation was reached with interviews, data analysis began.

Each interview was reviewed audibly twice and then transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions included notes on participant emotions and voice fluctuations. Upon completing transcriptions, important statements were highlighted. The researcher used highlighted statements to describe themes for each interview. Member checks were conducted with all interviewees to ensure that the themes accurately represented their feelings. This helps to clarify findings (Creswell et al., 2007). Individual interview themes informed research themes. Research themes were recorded, and important statements from each interview were copied and pasted under the theme that best encompassed them. For example, some categories of research themes included: “Being Present”, “Negotiating Barriers to the Outdoors”, and “Health and Wellness”. If statements were applicable to multiple themes, they were copied to both theme pages. Microsoft Word was the software that was used to organize themes.

Before statements were copied and pasted, each transcript was colour coded. All data remained in its original transcript colour. This process ensured that the themes coded were present in multiple interviews, because each theme had statements of many colours. After statements were thematically sorted, themes were reviewed. In some cases, themes were deemed similar and grouped together. For example: safety, weather, and energy level were combined to be “Negotiating Constraints to the Outdoors.” In other cases, single themes were broken into two categories. For example: Reflective behaviours was separated into two separate themes: “Mental Awareness” and “Shared Experiences.”

After initial sorting, themes were reviewed by the researcher and a member of her supervisory committee. At this time, the themes were organized into groups that informed the research questions, and termed subthemes. Each of these groups became a core theme.

After thematic organization was completed, themes were checked back with original interview themes to ensure that the coding was an accurate representation of the interviews. Thematic organization is described in appendix G. Data that did not fit into themes was not ignored, as presented in the findings.

Assumptions & Limitations

The researcher assumed the following to be true of this study:

1. Participants were able to articulate a clear reflection of their experiences
2. Interviews were an appropriate method for understanding participant experiences

The researcher also acknowledged that the following *limitations* of this study may have impacted the researcher, participants, data, or data analysis:

1. There was potential bias on behalf of the researcher and participants due to connection with dog ownership and nature
2. The participants may not have been able to recall all applicable memories for interviews
3. Gender, relationship status, and stage of life may have impacted information presented
4. The sample size was small

Chapter 4 – Findings

Introduction

This study discusses themes that were generated from eight different individuals' unique experiences spending time in wild spaces with their dog. The participants all drew meaning from participating in these wilderness activities with their canine partner. The interviewees told stories (both positive and negative), which represented the essence of spending time in nature with a dog. The themes that emerged from the interviews served to address the three research questions: what is the essence of spending time in nature with one's dog; how do nature experience differ when one has a dog with them, as compared to when they do not; and how does spending time in nature contribute to one's overall wellness? After thematic coding, it was found that the third research question could be expanded to reflect a set of larger outcomes. To better address findings, the third question was rephrased as: What are the outcomes of spending time in nature with one's dog?

All interviews were transcribed and themed as outlined in the previous section. This chapter will present a summary of participants, describe key themes from each interview, and illustrate the thematic findings from all 8 interviews.

Participant Biographies

Each of the eight study participants had varying levels of experience in the outdoors and with dog ownership; however, all participants spent at least 6 hours in wild space each week with their adventure dog. Their dogs were all able to accompany them in wild spaces

on an off leash capacity. Table 1 gives an overview of participants, outlining their age, time spent in nature (with and without their dog), and their experience with dog ownership.

Table 1.

Baseline Demographics of Participants

Participant (Name has been changed)	Age Range	Amount of Time Spent in Nature	% of Time in Nature Spent With Dog.	Type of Nature Space Where Participant Spends Most Time	Type of Dog	Length of Dog Ownership	Interview Time
Lily	30-40 Years	10-20 Hours/ Week	85%	Long distance trail networks. Minimal human impact	Medium -Large ~50lbs	3.5 Years	25 Minutes
Sidney	30-40 Years	35-40 Hours/ Week	95%	Trail networks and back country alpine hiking	Medium ~35lbs	2.5 Years	34 Minutes
Chloe	20-30 Years	12-25 Hours/ Week	90%	Hiking mountains (both with well cultivated trails and with dirt paths)	Two Large Dogs ~60lbs	4 Years	27 Minutes
Tina	30-40 Years	6-20 Hours/ Week	85%	Mix of wild and cultivated parks. Forest and Beaches	1 Medium -Large ~45lbs, 1 Large ~60lbs	8 Years	43 Minutes

Gabe	20-30 Years	10-20 Hours/ Week	80%	Coastal trails & long distance footpaths	1 Small- Medium ~30lbs, One Large ~55lbs	5 Years	42 Minutes
Margo	40+ Years	20-30 Hours/ Week	100%	Wild space with minimal trail networking/ human impact	2 XLarge ~80lbs	30 Years	26 Minutes
Paige	60+ Years	15-30 Hours/ Week	90%	Natural yard spaces, wilderness trails, and cultivated foot paths	2 Small ~20lbs	30 Years	28 Minutes
Stephanie	30-40 Years	50-70 Hours/ Week	100%	Wild mountain trails & back country hills	3 Medium Large ~50lbs	20 Years	22 Minutes

Participants are introduced through profiles below. These profiles provide insight into the world of each participant, and highlight core themes that emerged from each individual interview. All names and identifying features of participants and their dogs have been changed to protect their identities.

Lily

Lily grew up in a city environment, which inspired her to live in a location where she can connect with nature on a daily basis. For her, being in nature is calming and reviving.

“Nature is a safe place, and a free place... Being outdoors is a necessity for me and for my health”

She has had her medium-sized adventure dog since puppyhood, and they have grown together exploring the outdoor spaces on Vancouver Island and beyond.

“I feel like [my dog and I] are meant to be together. We love each other, and we both love to be outside and move our bodies. She is a high energy dog, but she is very happy and always gets along with other dogs and people”

Lily spends most of her time outdoors, she estimates 85%, with her dog. She generally looks for adventure locations that would be a good fit for her dog to come along- and only refrains from bringing her when she goes to back country locations where the dog could negatively influence the local flora and fauna.

“I don’t ever want to put her in danger, or put other animals in danger. So on longer, backcountry expeditions I wouldn’t bring my dog. I have too much respect for the park and for the animals in the area.”

Lily is currently employed in a position where she spends working time both indoors and outdoors; however, she does not bring her dog to work. The interview focused on the personal time she spends in nature with her dog. Core themes that were present in Lily’s interview included: Her dog provides a sense of companionship, joy, and positive energy for her in the outdoors. She felt that alone, she focuses more on her meditative experience, but that the positive benefits of sharing the experience with her dog far outweighed the benefits of being alone. She found that sharing nature with her dog inspired her to see

nature in a new perspective; because of her dog, she understands nature better in the rain, and is introduced to new sights due to her dog's curiosity.

Sidney

Sidney grew up near the mountains, and feels the most at home when he is far removed from the urban environment.

"For me, I think it's an interesting thing because I find nature is [a place] where I feel more at peace and have that central feeling of oneness and confidence, so for example I don't feel like I am naturally in place walking downtown. But, even if I'm just down by the [water] where I'm slightly away from the hustle and bustle of the city I feel like I'm more naturally inclined to that space. However, when I feel like I'm truly in nature is when I am away from any sort of built-up things, so if I look across the horizon I would not see any buildings [and] I'm not going to hear traffic."

He is happiest outdoors, and spends at least 5 hours a day outside with his dog. He adopted his dog as a puppy, and they have spent the last year adventuring together. Sidney and his dog can often be found hiking, trail running, and exploring local beaches.

"[My dog is] super energetic and you know he's just got this like lust for life especially out running around off leash... so it's nice to have that because I find that he invigorates me."

In Sidney's interview, core themes that were present included: he found that spending time with his dog in nature is restorative. In wild space there is a level of peace and tranquility that cannot be reached in the built environment. His dog encourages him to get outside in the early mornings, watch sunrises, and find that peace. In nature he feels that it is easier to understand himself and his dog. There is simplicity in testing comfort zones in the outdoors, where he feels that he knows what he is able to accomplish. He feels more

confident and appreciates his and his dog's abilities and limitations. When they are in nature spaces, Sidney believes that he and his dog become their truest selves.

Chloe

Chloe has 2 dogs, she has one rescued dog and one that she has raised from puppyhood. She spends at least 20 hours a week in nature with her dogs, and likes to be as far removed from the city as possible. She feels most peaceful when she is away from human made noise.

"[In Nature, I am] more relaxed and less cluttered in my mind. I can actually let things go and be more in the moment, rather than thinking about what needs to be done or dealt with [in everyday life]... I also really like the quiet- if you can hear a road, we are not far enough out."

She can often be found in the mountains or exploring on beaches. She takes her dogs everywhere with her, and strives to find new locations to explore with her adventure dogs.

"My dogs influence me to be out for longer periods of time, and to go and check out new places. Having my own dogs as an adult (rather than family dogs growing up) has really changed the way that I spend my free time- and creates a drive for me to get out and see new trails and places."

In Chloe's interview, some key themes that emerged were: finding a sense of safety and security alongside her dogs. She found that hiking in places alone, she was hyper aware of her location and surroundings. When she was with her dogs she was able to relax more, because she does not feel as nervous about wild animals or dangerous situations. Her dogs

inspire her to explore new places, they are true adventure dogs and she loves to share the excitement of finding new wild spaces for them to explore. Chloe's dogs are a huge part of her life, and she feels like their relationship is co-dependent. They need each other.

Tina

Tina has grown up as a nature lover and a dog lover. She has raised one of her dogs from puppyhood, and has adopted a second, adult dog. She spends most of her time outdoors with her dogs exploring coastal forests.

"I love the trees, and definitely being outdoors and interacting with the outdoors. So for me, it is not just necessarily like going for a walk in the park, it is more about experiencing the outdoors. Having those moments where you stop and take in your surroundings, touch, feel and smell."

Her dogs have very different personalities, but both thrive on adventures.

"[Both of my dogs] adventure in different ways. My first dog has a real curiosity and the need to check everything out. My second, he has so much energy. For him, it's about more of the physical adventures like: jumping off rocks, and running around obstacles."

Tina has lived and worked in nature for many years, and finds that wild spaces can be a therapeutic tool, and help create bonds with both humans and dogs.

"A lot of my friends and family that I experience nature with also have dogs, and so we enjoy shared experiences but we also enjoy nature with our dogs. Which kind of adds a double layer of to those experiences."

Tina feels that nature is an experience, and is more engaging than simply being outside. It is in wild spaces that she feels more connected to her dogs. She also finds that these spaces help her to better connect with her family and friends. Because many of her loved ones also have dogs, she enjoys finding places to meet others and take groups of dogs on new adventures. Another theme that was central to Tina's interview was the idea of challenge. She likes to try new things with her dogs, and accomplish challenges together. She feels that it is through experience that lasting, meaningful bonds are formed.

Gabe

Gabe has grown up with dogs, and recently adopted a puppy. He loves local ecosystems, and hikes forested trails, climbs mountains, and explores beaches with his dogs nearly every day.

"[I like to go where the] paths are dirt paths and there's trees and you have ... can't hear cars and all that, so it feels more like nature to me. Places that are well removed from the quote - unquote "human world," the built environment. Typically, [we like it where it is] green and full of trees and birds and [there is an] absence of cars and concrete."

He is very active in the outdoors, both personally and professionally. Although he often works outdoors, he does not take his dog to work. In his personal time, he likes to take his dogs with him as many places as possible- and share the beauty, excitement, and wildness of nature.

“I love watching [my dogs] run through the woods and jump over nurse logs and fallen trees and just race around up and under things. I think that's super sweet. I appreciate things a lot more when I am with the dog who's in this euphoric state.”

A theme that was central in Gabe's interview was: spending time with dogs in wild spaces requires focus, but this makes experiences more meaningful and memorable than times spent alone in nature. He often feels that his attention gravitates to his dogs when he takes them into wild spaces. This is especially true for his puppy, which is still working through training. However, each milestone he reaches with his puppy is special, and he is very happy to see his dogs grow together. He also finds that he feels happy when his dogs are happy.

Margo

Margo has two large dogs, and has grown up with dogs her whole life. She cannot foresee a time in the future when she will not have dog companions, as they are a very meaningful part of her life. She finds peace in the natural environment.

“[Being in nature is] wonderful. It is a decompression, and sharing the space with my dog compounds those feelings by a million times.”

She spends a great deal of time in the outdoors adventuring with dogs, and likes to find remote wilderness that is far removed from the built environment.

“I try to go places where there are no people. I have a very large dog, so I take him places where he can run free and I do not have to worry about him. “

Margo is very happy to have access to natural spaces, and enjoys walking in all weather conditions. She finds it exciting that she can find wild spaces where she and her dogs do not run into any other humans for hours. A theme that was clear in Margo's interview was: being in nature with her dogs encourages a trusting bond between them. Because they experience journeys and adventures together, they act more like a team. She knows that when one of her dogs is able to ignore distractions in the wilderness and focus on her, they are doing well in their training. She also feels that nature provides stress relief from daily life.

Paige

Paige has two dogs, and has lived with dogs nearly her entire life. She spends hours outside with her dogs every day. She can often be found hiking in trail networks that are far removed from the urban environment.

"Where I live, I have close access to four different Trail networks in forested areas and natural forested areas. Mostly healthy second growth but some of it is first growth."

As well as doing a great deal of hiking, she also enjoys living in a rural area and gardening with her dogs. Paige's connection and bond with her dogs is very meaningful, and she feels most grounded and calm when she is in nature with them.

"[Being in nature with my dogs] brings me peace that I don't have in urban areas or more stimulating environments, it makes me smile, and it brings me awareness. I am aware of what birds I am seeing, what insects am I seeing, what kind of smells. So I get a real conscious

awareness of my surroundings it also brings me a sense of wellbeing. And a sense of connectedness with nature, and grounded-ness.”

Themes that were present in Paige’s interview were: dogs in nature radiate a joy and unfiltered happiness that is infectious and fun. She feels so wonderful when she can share these moments with her dogs. They bound around on the trail with big smiles on their faces, and it makes her smile. She described that sharing a life with a dog creates a responsibility to bring the dog into natural, wild space. The dogs deserve to go on adventures, so that is where she takes them. The stage of life that Paige is at now is her favourite stage, yet- and her dogs play a big role in her happiness.

Stephanie

Stephanie has three dogs, and loves spending time with them. She spends nearly four hours a day hiking in local forests and mountains. She is most relaxed when she is far removed from the spaces the most people frequent, and enjoys the solitude and calm of the deep forest.

“One of the places I walk I never ever see anyone, so I’m able to relax even that much more. One of the other places I walk, I will run into people from time to time and it’s usually unexpectedly and it can be startling and jarring and uncomfortable.”

She has made a career of spending time in nature with dogs. Stephanie continues to take dogs into nature and park spaces in both a personal and professional context. She hopes that park space can be safe and enjoyable for all park users.

"I'm always very appreciative of the space and the fact that we get to have this. Yeah, just more appreciative seeing the dog run around makes me thankful for the space that we have."

Themes that were present in Stephanie's interview include: Stephanie feels that dogs can be preferable companions and adventure partners to people. She said that they make a perfect walking buddy. She will never have a time in her future, where she does not have a dog. Stephanie really enjoys finding wilderness space that is remote, and calm. She has a few key locations where she rarely sees any other people. She enjoys seeing nature through a dog's eyes because it allows her to be in touch with their surroundings. When she notices the areas of nature that her dogs pay attention to, she is able to take in a lot more.

Themes

Throughout the coding process, themes began to emerge that were consistent between interviews. This process was described in Chapter three. The three main themes that emerged were: spending time in nature with a dog creates a heightened nature experience, dogs factor in negotiating constraints in the outdoors, and spending time in nature with dogs leads to particular outcomes (see table 2). Within these three main themes, there are several subthemes. Subthemes outline specific experiences and feelings, while themes capture the essence, or core concepts of the subthemes.

These are outlined in Appendix F. Each of the three themes tends to best address one of the three key research questions, and they are organized in this fashion to illustrate the connection.

Due to the nature of the research, certain participants were particularly passionate around one area- and thus, certain participants gave interviews that were dominant in certain themes. However, overall themes emerged and were consistent across all interviews. Subthemes that emerged were consistent throughout at least three of the eight interviews. The researcher made an effort to ensure that data had been equally represented throughout thematic findings. This was done through colour coding. Each transcript had a specific colour. Themes were recorded, with key statements from interviews pasted in colour below theme titles. After sorting the statements, the researcher checked to ensure that each colour was equally represented throughout each theme. If a theme only had statements of one colour, it became clear that it was only important to one participant. The researcher did not manipulate quotes to create alignment; differing opinions may be highlighted within a sub theme. Each theme and sub theme is described in the following sections, and are expanded upon as to how they inform answers to the three key research questions.

Table 2

Table of Themes and Sub Themes

Research Questions	What is essence of spending time in nature with one's dog?	How do nature experiences differ when one has a dog with them, as compared to when they do not?	What are the outcomes of spending time in nature with one's dog?
Themes	Heightened experience	Negotiating constraints in the outdoors	Outcomes & challenges
Number of participants (n) that discussed theme	N=8	N=8	N=8
Subthemes	Physical awareness	Safety	Social connection
Number of participants (n) that discussed subtheme	N=8	N=6	N=7
Subthemes	Mental focus	Weather	Fitness & physical activity
Number of participants (n) that discussed subtheme	N=7	N=6	N=8
Subthemes	Happiness & joy	Energy level	Mental restoration
Number of participants (n) that discussed subtheme	N=8	N=3	N=8
Subthemes	Shared Experiences	Logistics	Training & bond
Number of participants (n)	N=6	N=5	N=6

that discussed subtheme	
Subthemes	Memories
Number of participants (n) that discussed subtheme	N=8

Theme One: Heightened Experience

Theme one relates to the first research question: what is the essence of spending time in nature with one's dog? The theme and related subthemes will be introduced and discussed, and then linked to this research question. Wilderness settings provide a mix of aesthetic pleasure, challenge, and renewal that help to generate positive feelings and peak experiences (Macdonald, Wearing, & Ponting, 2009). Based on participants' interviews, it was determined that these peak experiences could be heightened by the presence of one's dog. Margo stated that nature feels *"wonderful, and sharing the space with my dog compounds those feelings by a million times!"* The idea that dogs can enhance experiences and influence awareness in nature separates into four subthemes: physical awareness, mental awareness and focus, happiness and joy, and shared experiences.

Physical Awareness

Experiencing nature makes individuals happier, healthier, people (Hofmann et al., 2018). Understanding ecosystems and interacting with environments allows individuals to feel linked to their surroundings (Russel, et al., 2013). It was clear that the participants

interviewed felt this connection. Gabe states how his understanding of a place influences his feelings toward it.

“Well, [Saanich parks are wonderful] because they are close to my parents place and I know the boundaries. It's also great because it is not paved walkways and there are big tall Douglas fir trees and cedar trees and they've been doing tons of restoration and pulling of ivy so it's looking more and more like what I would consider a natural Green Space. I've also spent a lot of time on Mt. Tolmie which is a totally different space, it is not as treed- but there are Gary oak ecosystems and in the summer and spring when you have the camas up and everything it's got beautiful flowers and bees and birds.”

As well as feeling connected to local spaces, participants felt more aware of physical surroundings when they spent time in nature with their dogs. Sidney discussed how his dog increased his awareness of the space around him.

“If we are out he tends to pick out things that you might not have noticed. So he likes hunting for crabs, he'll find crabs or that kind of thing. Or birds, he is really good at picking out birds. So, you know, you might not have the tranquility, but I find because he's got these like extra sensory hearing and smell, you'll be notified to things you might not have noticed. He might take off up a trail, and you'll think that looks pretty cool and you will end up there.”

Tina mirrors this idea, stating that when she is with her dogs in nature *“it helps me to experience the place in a deeper level. With the dogs I think that you take in the surroundings more, and you are able to see them through the eyes of my dogs and not just through my own perspective. Often I'll stay on the trail and I will follow the trail markers but the dogs will*

wander and explore under a branch or bark of a tree or something like that, and it's as though it brings my attention to the small details that I may have missed."

Immersive natural experiences have a positive effect on people's everyday lives (Bell et al., 2015). Bringing dogs into nature creates a more immersive experience. Margo found that her dogs allow her to find new ways of experiencing nature. *"I don't generally go under clumps of bush, but my dogs do. I watch where they are going and I might climb down and ask what they are doing that and see new places."* Chloe also discussed the fact that her dogs kept her physical awareness on her immediate surroundings. When hiking solo, she spends more time looking at views and thinking about the journey as a whole, but when her dogs were with her *"I pay more attention to the smaller things."*

Because they were required to focus on their dogs, many participants felt like, in turn, they focused more on the space around them. A common theme throughout seven of the eight interviews was that participants notice more about their immediate physical environment in nature when a dog accompanies them. Often the dog would be interested in smelling or interacting with nature, which would draw the participant's interest to their surroundings. It was also noted that dogs physically lead nature users to new spaces. Chloe mentioned that because of her dogs, she dedicates weekends to finding new adventure spaces. She likes to see how they light up in different landscapes and new settings.

Increasing one's exposure to nature has been shown to improve overall health; however, emotional wellbeing is most positively associated with activity in nature (Pasanen, Tyrvaenen, & Korpela, 2014). When participants were sharing stories about the

essence of their involvement in nature with their dogs, emotional health was eminent in nearly every experience. Because individuals are encountering new nature spaces, and becoming increasingly aware of their surroundings due to their dog, bringing a dog may increase the health benefits that would be obtained from the activity.

Mental Awareness and Focus

As well as discussing heightened awareness of physical surroundings, participants discussed the effect that bringing dogs into wild spaces had on their mental awareness and focus. Many participants felt that having their dog with them kept them mentally in the moment, and heightened their focus. Paige said that if she were to hike on her own, *“I would be more likely to zone out, to start thinking about other things... I think about conversations or things from the day and am not conscious of what is around me... I do this anyway- but less so when my dogs are with me.”* Nature is a setting where one can focus on the present, and simply be here now (Van Brunt, 2010). Margo felt similarly, that if she did not bring her dogs in nature *“I suspect that on my own I might go off to la la land. I like to watch the dogs, and share the moment with them. I would not get nearly as much out of a walk without them.”*

Tina finds that her dogs bring her focus to the moment, rather than the overall goal of the experience.

“Yeah, I would say I think I focus more on, like, the journey if I'm by myself. On many of my hikes alone I start to think that I need to get from point A to point B and wouldn't necessarily like, appreciate and look around as much. But when I'm with the dogs it's like it's a little bit of both. I need to focus on what they are doing.”

While Gabe finds that bringing his dog into nature influences his focus, it is in a different way. Because his dog is a puppy, training requires mental focus, which can take him out of the nature moment.

“One thing I’ve noticed is that because [my dog] is a puppy, I am constantly watching where she’s going and making sure she’s with me and like we’re training her so I’m calling her back and making her sit and giving her treats. So, um, I am maybe a little less in the moment sometimes when I’m in nature with her then when I am by myself. And it is the same with [my older dog], but to a lesser extent because I know she is always going to find me.”

Six participants highlighted that bringing a dog kept them ‘in the moment.’ Because they were aware of the dog, they were less likely to daydream, stress, or think about the adventure’s destination point. These feelings are important when thinking about the meaning of the experience. McDonald, Wearing, and Ponting found that individuals that paid attention to the qualities of a wilderness setting were more likely to experience awe, or have peak moments (2009). The idea that one’s dog helps a person to stay mentally present may also have an impact on their mental restoration. This is key to the essence of the experience. The researcher probed to better understand if people seek clarity and restoration when going on an adventure with their dogs, or if this was something that they noticed after the fact, upon reflection. Responses were split, with some participants actively looking for these feelings, and others becoming aware of them after being in the wilderness; however the experience of these feelings was consistent. Individuals felt that having their dog heightened their mental awareness and focus in wilderness settings.

Happiness and Joy

When asked to share a favourite memory from being with their dog in nature, almost every participant had a response illustrating a moment where their dog showcased unbridled joy, or pure happiness. Seeing their dog in this state felt infectious, where participants could not help but feel happy too. Paige says, *“My young dog especially, he will be up the trail and then look at me and come running back – as if he is saying “aren’t we having a great time?!” So there is joy in moments that may have been neutral. Whenever my dogs have fun, I have fun too.”*

Sidney had a similar experience, when his dog was first allowed to run off leash after an injury.

“We got down by the river there and I just let him off the leash and it was like, I think the happiest a being on Earth has ever been. You could tell he was grinning right, and he just was so happy to be off leash again because he is not used to being on leash that often. He was just flying over logs and he’s climbing up on stumps and just like, just ripping. He was like a kid, just free right. So I think that is a fond memory you know going forward, just to see his sheer bliss”

Lily remembered a similar moment with her dog.

“One of my favourite memories, oh, there are so many. I think maybe it was the first time I took her into real snow, and her seeing snow for the first time, she was just like, I’m just so happy I got to have witnessed it. She was just so beside herself. She was like, running, digging, disappearing, reappearing again and having the time of her life. We don’t get to see real

snow too much living here. But yeah, that is a time I'll never forget. I got so much joy out of watching her when she is so free and happy."

Stephanie finds that she can feel happiness even in sticky situations.

"They come out of the woods with some deer bone or covered in poo or something and they just have a big grin on their face and they're just so happy. I have several memories of that. My oldest dog right now came up from the banks down toward the beach. She was covered from head to toe in otter poo. I shook my head and wanted to kill her, but, you know, she was just so happy. Those moments of pure joy really stand out. "

As well as picking up on a dog's emotions, the connection shared with a dog is a source on happiness. Lily shares *"we love each other. She is such a source of joy for me. Great companionship, she is so loyal. She is always happy to see me and I am always happy to see her, um, it is always a positive experience."* Pets are perfect companions; they provide unconditional love and motivation to stay healthy (Halm, 2008). Chloe describes her relationship with her dogs as co-dependent.

Another fundamental subtheme illustrating the essence of spending time with a dog in nature was: happiness and joy. When asked to recount memories of their dog in the wilderness, many participants softened, smiled and laughed. They described times when their dog was truly happy. Running, smiling, and playing in the spaces that nature users felt most connected to. Evidence suggests that happiness is contagious, and can spread through social networks (Matteson, McGue, & Iacono, 2013). People's happiness depends on the happiness of those with whom they are connected (Fowler & Christakis, 2008).

While this research explores the effect of happiness between people, the same might be true for happiness between a person and animal. In this study, it was clear that seeing their pet in a state of pure joy created meaningful moments. There was joy in times when there might not have been, there was laughter on challenging terrain, and there was happiness through seeing a dog play and explore. In essence, these moments are what experiencing nature with a dog is all about.

Shared Experiences

Experiences can take on a new meaning when they are shared, and a common theme throughout interviews was the impact of sharing beautiful, natural space with a beloved companion. *“Having the dogs with me is a social interaction that changes the feeling of the walk”* says Paige. Tina elaborates on this same idea.

“I think, it is really special that the dogs love nature just as much as I do, [my oldest dog] can be a bit of a diva sometimes, so with her personality, you wouldn't think that she would like getting dirty or messy and getting out in nature. But when you put her outside she acts like goofball of a girl, and she just needs to get into things and explore and it's just a whole other side of her, and I just love being able to experience that part of her personality. When she gets to be outside and be wild and I think that's like, where she's most comfortable because that's where she got to grow up and it brings out the puppy in her again which is really nice.”

These feelings resonate with the idea of being ones 'true self' and sharing that experience with a dog. In nature, individuals can share the feeling of wildness with their dogs. Sidney describes his feelings.

"I think the main thing is that, that nature is where we should be. That's where humans were evolved and developed, being in that space it's just in us, it is like part of what we are right, and I think it's the muted reality that we all live that we kind of forget that that's what life is about. When we are in wild spaces, we feel more wild."

The feeling of 'being where you are meant to be' also resonated with Lily, *"it is so amazing to see [my dog] running free and like, turn around smiling. It is just the energy that it exudes, she's like, she's in her home, she's in her element and that makes me think- so am I and that is very exciting."* Chloe also feels the impact of the wild, *"[my dogs] go a little more wild actually. Sometimes they feel like the whole mountain belongs to them, vs an area where there is more people and it is, like, less natural. I think that they understand that we are sharing the space. The dogs tend to act more wildlike in a wild space."*

As well as creating links through social connections, some evidence suggests that happiness can help people cooperate. Laughter and smiling can tune a group emotionally, putting them on the same wavelength so that can work together more effectively (Seligman, 2004). This links to the third subtheme, shared journey. Many participants explained that being in nature with their dog allowed them to reach the same mental level. Tina mentioned, *"the dogs and I both experience [nature] together and kind of brings us to the same level of our energy and enthusiasm, and were able to have a match in our levels which is really nice."* These levels might also reflect the space. As Sidney said, *"in wild spaces, we feel more wild."* These feelings inform the first research question, because the essence of the experiences is related to the feeling of sharing the experience. Christopher

McCandless once wrote, “happiness is only real when shared,” which speaks to the idea that having accompaniment on a journey heightens the experience (Krakauer, 2009).

Theme One Summary

The overall theme of dogs creating a heightened experience in nature, which is demonstrated through enhanced physical awareness, mental focus, and shared experiences, illustrates the essence of being with one’s dog in nature. The heightened experience creates a shift in how individuals interact with their environments, how they notice their surroundings, and how they feel about the experience. While different individuals have different emotions about how they feel interacting with their dogs in natural space, in its essence, being with a dog in nature is about feeling wild, feeling connected, and feeling engaged with one’s surroundings

Theme Two: Negotiating Constraints to the Outdoors

As discussed in the introduction, the most common reasons people feel that they do not participate in outdoor physical activity includes: lack of motivation, lack of support, poor weather, lack of time and skill, and poor health (Chinn et al., 2006). Sharing a life with a dog can help a person to navigate these constraints. Constraints to participating in outdoor activities that were identified by participants in this study are the subthemes that will be discussed in this section: safety, weather, energy level, and logistics. Because people tend to navigate constraints differently when they are with their dogs, these constraints inform the second key research question: how is your nature experience different when you have your dog with you, as compared to when you do not?

Safety

There are risks associated with spending large quantities of time in the outdoors. Even activities that are perceived as low-risk, such as walking, have inherent risk and must be completed with a certain degree of skill (Rantala & Valkonen, 2011). Seven out of Eight participants indicated bringing a dog with them had an influence on safety. The effect of the influence was not consistent among all participants.

Discussing how their dogs positively influenced her safety, Tina said, *"I would say safety would be improved with the dogs. I feel safer when I have the dogs because I feel like there's that extra protection Factor if I ran into a person that may not be the best person or wildlife."* Chloe felt a similar sense of protection with her dogs. *"I feel safer when I have my dogs. Sometimes when you're way out in the bush I know that most wild animals aren't going to touch me if my dogs are around on the island I am not always as worried, most animals tend to keep their distance. My dogs are quite large, so it gives me a sense of security. If I don't have the dogs, I am much more aware of myself and my position in the woods."*

In contrast to these feelings, Gabe felt that having a dog put him more at risk with wildlife.

"There are definitely places that I would not take a dog, because they're probably more likely to attract other animals. Discovery Island, where there's the wolf and dogs are not allowed, well someone brought a dog maybe a year ago, and they got stalked by the wolf. So I would be cautious bringing a dog somewhere there was a real animal threat. Like hiking the Nootka trail. I do that every year, and I'm not going to take [either of my dogs] because there are many active wolfs and cougars."

Lily had a similar worry about wildlife, mentioning *“I respect other animals too much, that I don't want to put [my dog] in danger and don't want to put other animals in danger. So there are, like backcountry hikes where I would not take her out of respect for the park”*

While six out of eight participants identified that their dog impacted their safety, only Tina and Chloe mentioned that they felt that their dogs had an impact on her personal safety with regards to other people.

When accessing natural environments, safety can be a constraint. In the wilderness settings, people can feel fearful and uncertain (Bixler & Floyd, 1997). There are risks involved with spending time outdoors. Injuries, animals, and other nature users may act to create feelings of anxiety or panic (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). While the researcher expected the data to be robust and complete in this area, participants had differing opinions about how a dog impacted their safety in nature. Some participants indicated that they felt safer with their dog, while others denoted that bringing their dog provided additional constraints for them to negotiate.

Participants shared that their dog offered a sense of protection against wildlife. Margo mentioned, *“We have also heard cougars chittering when hiking, and he is interested in the sound and always puts his body between the sound and me. So yes, we are very close.”* Chloe also shared that her dogs acted as protectors in the wilderness. *“I know that most wild animals aren't going to touch me if my dogs are around.”* These feelings may be reflective of the size or breed of the dog. Tina also felt that her dogs offered protection from other park users. She felt safer walking along if she had her dogs with her.

Dogs can certainly offer a sense of security, but they can also attract wildlife or

become injured, themselves. Lily, Gabe, and Sidney all shared that they took special considerations with their dogs in certain wildlife habitats. Tina shared that managing her dogs' safety could put hers at risk. "[I am] *kind of constantly doing that risk assessment from their perspective as well as my own. Like knowing if she's going to close the edge and she slips and Falls that I may have to go and grab her. That's in my own safety at risk as well, so just thinking about the repercussions of their actions.*" While these factors may have added constraints, they did not necessarily inhibit participant from bringing their dog on nature adventures.

These constraint negotiations speak to the difference in experience a person has, depending on if they are with their dog. In some circumstances, the presence of the dog can make the experience feel safer. However, a dog can also change the experience by including additional constraints that must be negotiated.

Weather

When detailing her experiences hiking with her dogs in nature, Stephanie casually mentioned, "*lots of raingear, I need to have lots of raingear.*" Living on the west coast of Canada, weather is a constraint that residents live with on a daily basis. Spending time in nature with a dog can influence what a person views as appropriate walking conditions. While humans are able to justify the decision to defer a walk due to rain; this justification is harder to make when a dog is dependent on a person for exercise (Wharf Higgins et al., 2013). Due to the dog's walking expectations, rain becomes normalized as walking weather.

Lily discussed how her dog motivates her to go walking. *“She is such an encouragement to get outside- and she deserves to be outside. I mean there are times where if it's pissing rain, or really cold, and I would not generally want to leave my house. But she is still gazing out the door- so it might take me awhile to get going, but she is so motivating, and once I get out there, I am so grateful.”*

Sidney is similarly motivated by his adventure dog, *“I think he can tend to be a catalyst for getting me outside some days. A couple nights ago when it was just dumping rain, I didn't want to go outside. But you come home and he has just got this go-gettem attitude where he's like, “come on like let's do this”, and you can't say no. And it ended up being awesome.”*

Margo embraces the weather with her dogs, *“I do not stay in because it is raining. I can be safe and comfortable in all conditions. The weather is a guide for where we will go- and we go out in all kinds of weather. If it is raining really hard, we might find a trail with a thick, forested canopy for protection. We look for shaded trails when it is too hot and sunny. When it is hot, we also hike in areas where there are active streams. Getting wet feet does not matter for us, I have wet feet right now.”*

While most participants indicated that their dog motivated them to spend time outdoors in different types of weather, they did not necessarily feel that this changed their relationship with nature. It impacted the type of hiking and walking they participated in, but not the connection that was felt.

Weather is a constraint that must be navigated when accessing natural spaces. Wolff and Fitzhugh (2011) found a strong relationship between the weather, and levels of outdoor

physical activity. When the weather is poor, people tend to spend less time participating in activities in nature. Participants in this study felt that their dogs helped them to navigate this constraint. Because their dogs enjoyed being outside in many different weather conditions, individuals were encouraged to get outside more often. Individuals indicated that they were grateful for this motivation.

As well as spending more time outside in diverse weather conditions, participants were motivated to understand environments in inclement weather. Margo explained that the weather helped inform her decisions on where she would take her dogs. In the rain, there were areas with heavy forested canopy. In the wind, they would find clear areas, away from the risk of falling branches. In the sunshine, they looked for areas with active streams and protection from the elements. Because she wanted to take the dogs into nature, she learned ways to actively negotiate the constraint of weather.

While the researcher expected participants' perceptions of their surroundings to change when they experienced them in different types of weather, this was not the case. Participants did not find that they felt differently about the spaces themselves, they were simply happy to have the encouragement to be in the spaces more often.

When thinking about this subtheme in terms of the research question, navigating the constraint of weather can change nature experiences, because individuals were more likely to participate in an adventure in the rain with their dogs. Without their dogs, they generally reserved outdoor activities for clear weather.

Energy Level

Both human and canine energy levels can influence the amount of time that an adventure dog owner spends outside. Chloe mentioned that she generally does not

participate in nature activities without her dogs, because she *“would still have to come home and exercise them.”* Because she does not have a large, fenced yard, she feels a responsibility to her dogs to get them out walking or hiking every day. She also finds that after a long hike, *“they listen better. Probably because they are tired.”*

Stephanie finds that her dogs motivate her to go walking, even if she is feeling tired. *“If you have got a two year old [active, working dog] looking at you like, ‘when are we leaving’ you have to go. I mean, I could have two broken legs and I would still have to go out with him.”* Paige feels a *“sense of responsibility to exercise and walk [her dogs]...and [she] also really enjoys their companionship”*.

Because nature is a restorative environment, spending time in the wilderness can be a very positive and replenishing experience for individuals feeling tired. However, finding the motivation to go to these spaces is a challenge. Dogs can help people to navigate that constraint and appreciate nature when a person is in a different mindset, which can be a positive experience. Sidney describes this occurrence with his dog.

“You know, some days you could be totally burnt out from work or whatever happened in your day, and you just want to go home and sit on the couch and eat French fries. But it is pretty impossible to do that with a high-energy dog. So he is super energetic and you know, he has just got this lust for life, especially when he is our running off leash... He is always ready to roll, so even when I would not think I was up to it, you know, I try and take him out for a run to spaces where he can run too. It’s so nice to have that because I find that he invigorates me...”

People generally participate in outdoor activities when they have the energy to do so. Spending time in nature requires planning, focus, and drive. The motivation to navigate through low energy levels was similar to the way that dogs help their owners navigate through inclement weather conditions. Because the dog wants to spend time outdoors, participants were encouraged to experience nature-even when they felt tired. Sidney mentioned that he liked to view sunrises, but had made himself a resolution to watch as many as he could in the last year. *"I think I got about 75% of them, and I don't think I would have if I didn't have a dog. Because he got in the rhythm of getting up at 4:30 in the morning to catch the sunrise, so he would start to get restless, and he is good about it, but you know he is up. And then it is easier for you to not hit the snooze alarm and go back to bed."*

This subtheme is closely related to the sense of responsibility dog owners feel to their pets. Because their dog deserves the active time in nature, they will navigate personal constraints to make it happen. Lim and Rhodes found that a sense of responsibility one has to walk their dog highly correlates to dog walking behaviours. Interestingly, they also determined that a dog's energy level has more impact on walking behaviour than its size (2016). Many participants discussed their dog's energy level (in addition to their own) as a motivation to spend time in nature.

The level of energy an individual feels on an outdoor experience changes the experience itself. Participants indicated that because of their dogs, they tended to have more varied experiences, as they navigated the constraint of energy levels more regularly. They experienced nature through different moods and energy levels. Participants indicated that

once they got outdoors, they generally felt thankful and happy to be there, even if they had initially felt too tired to go.

Logistics

While there are many situations where dogs make walking and spending time in nature easier for their companions, it can be challenging to navigate the constraint of logistics when heading on an adventure with a dog. Tina discussed some of the considerations she works through, when deciding whether she will bring her dogs with her.

“With overnight trips, sometimes thinking about accommodations is a challenge and if we’re in a tent and like, we know it’s going to be really bad weather- having a wet dog in a tent isn’t always the easiest. Things like that and just, we wonder think about how inconvenient they can be for like an overnight. Sometimes they are not allowed to stay places, it can be a challenge or like, dangerous to leave them in the car or tent. You have to pack food and luggage and all that stuff for them, and so I feel like you have to do more planning if you bring the dogs. For example, we did a cross-country road trip through the states, and we would have loved to [have taken] them with us but thinking about the complications of crossing the border with pets and dealing with all of that is sometimes too much. I think when they are with us they become the focus of what we’re doing and where we can go and we definitely think about their needs first. Then when they’re not with us we maximize on activities that are challenging with dogs- so we might go out for dinner, or we might go where we can stop in at this little shop. But I would say in nature if I don’t have the dogs, I always miss them.”

There are many additional concerns when a dog is coming along on an adventure. Sidney had to plan, especially when the weather is warm. *“Sometimes I would just love to go for a run and not have to think about bringing him water, or what is he going to roll in, or something like that. So it is more of the caregiver piece. If it is the middle of summer and we are going for a run, I can’t stop and run any errands on the way home because I can’t leave him in the car. So I think that can be challenging when you have a dog.”*

Logistics also include what interactions might need to be anticipated. Because Chloe’s dog does not always react well to other dogs, she really plans the locations she takes him to, and avoids high traffic times. She hopes that these strategies minimize interaction with other dogs. Stephanie also plans her nature time in spaces where there are few dogs. *“I try to avoid people who don’t have control over their own dogs. It is hard walking in the trails up to somebody yelling at you as her dog is charging toward you. “My dog is friendly!” It can be very difficult because my dogs are not always friendly. As a result of that, I am more reclusive on my outings.”* Because Margo has a large dog, she plans to go places where other park users are not likely to be intimidated *“I have a couple trail networks, where I very rarely see anyone else, I have a very large dog, so I like to take him to places where I would not have to worry about him.”*

Logistics represent the coordination of multiple factors, including: people, supplies, and transport. When individuals bring a dog with them into nature, there are more logistics to consider. Participants talked about the need to bring additional water, food, leashes, and waste disposal bags when they had their dog. As well as thinking about the adventure itself, transport to and from the wilderness setting required coordination. Tina

and Chloe both described the challenge to keep their car clean with wet, muddy dogs. Sidney also reflected that he couldn't leave his dog in the car. So bringing his dog restricted his ability to stop, either before or after a nature experience. When asked why they may not bring a dog with them on an adventure, the everyday logistics did not seem to play a role. Cross-border custom regulations, sleeping accommodations, and airplane travel were barriers for individuals.

Logistical considerations also encompassed interaction with other people and dogs. Many participants indicated that they worked to find adventure locations that were far removed from others. Paige and Stephanie found that walking with dogs in nature can be difficult when cyclists speed up without notice, or when people illegally dirt bike on park trails. Margo discussed that other dogs could create challenging situations. She tried to avoid spaces with people who may not have their dog under control.

Logistical considerations can influence the ease of an outdoor activity, and add additional planning that is unnecessary when humans are hiking solo. This a key difference in individuals' experiences in nature with a dog, as compared to when they do not have a dog.

Theme Two Summary

Through understanding how participants negotiated constraints with their dogs in nature, it became clear that these constraints informed how their experience was different when they had their dogs with them, as opposed to when they spent time in nature without their dogs. Participants felt a shift in personal safety; there was increased use of nature spaces in many different weather conditions; with a dog, nature users spent more time

outdoors when they felt unmotivated; and dogs influenced the type of logistics one needs to be manage in order to effectively use nature spaces. Participants' experiences in nature changed when they had a dog with them, due to the way they worked through constraints. In some cases, dogs made it easier to navigate a constraint (weather and energy level), in other cases the findings were unclear (safety). Logistical considerations acted as a constraint that dog-owning nature users had to also navigate.

Theme Three: Outcomes

Theme three relates to the third research questions: what are the outcomes of spending time in nature with one's dog. This question is about better understanding what a person gets from their shared time in wild spaces with their adventure dog. Theme three, outcomes, and the connected subthemes will be introduced and discussed, as they link to the research question.

It was clear that participants felt there were some take away outcomes from the experience of spending time in their dog with nature. These resulted in five subthemes: social connection, fitness and physical activity, mental restoration, training and bond, and memories.

Social Connection

Social support is critical for psychological and physical wellbeing; human interactions allow people to feel like they belong (McConnell, Brown, Shoda, Stayton, & Martin, 2011). Tina explained how natural space helps her to connect to her loved ones.

"I feel like a lot of my friends and family also enjoy being outside and being in nature so I feel like that's a common ground where I can come together with the people I care about and experience something together even though it may be very different for each person that's outside experiencing the same nature. Everyone has their own individual experience but it's a group experience as well."

Lily had similar feelings; she felt that nature brought people together. *"It is also a great social time to get someone to come along [on a hike], so it brings the community together- I often will go into wild spaces and go on a dog walk with somebody."*

Many participants spoke passionately about trying to find natural space that was far removed from other nature users, but in general, they found that dogs could also play a role in facilitating social capital among strangers. Gabe discussed this phenomenon.

"[When I bring my dogs out in nature, my social interaction] is increased. I love seeing other dogs, and usually people react similarly to how I do, they will stop and say hi to the dog and then you get to conversations with not everyone, but some people. Like, what kind of dog is that? What was her name? Or, I think I know another person has a dog like yours! So, I think that if I have a dog or if another person has a dog, the interaction is deeper and typically longer."

Lily felt similar to Gabe, *"I think the dog encourages conversation a lot of the time. People want to talk about their dogs. And I'm a dog lover, so if I see you- I want to learn about your dog. Often the dogs also want to interact, or want to play and that might give a time for me and they're human to have a couple minutes to chat."* Tina noted that the dog is an easy

conversation topic. *“I would say having a dog makes it easier to talk to strangers because there is again that common bond if I know “you got a dog, I've got a dog, how old?” It is that springboard for an easy conversation with someone you don't know. I wouldn't necessarily have that with any person, I don't generally stop someone and say “hey, you've got shoes, I have shoes too!” So the dogs can really inspire conversations.”*

Sidney found that he could separate his dog-based interactions into different categories. *“I think people, so you have kind of two experiences generally. There are those you are like ‘oh, there's a dog I want to move on quicker,’ because you know there's lots of fear of dogs out there. Or you have the very opposite of that where it's like “Oh a dog!!!” You can even add a third scenario in there where you come across someone who also has a dog and then it becomes this moment where the dogs want to play. And now you are stuck having to interact with this stranger who you may not have expected to talk to. I find in those cases you pretty much always just end up talking about your dogs, and then finally it is enough, and you move on and the dogs are the only thing you've talked about or like, the weather.”*

Although many people felt that their dogs increased their conversations with others in nature, participants were all nature users who walked their dogs off leash in nature, and therefore, had trust in their dog's behaviours. Margo touched on the fact that dogs can restrict interactions, as well.

“Because my dog is large and can be intimidating, I do not let him approach people. He has to work all the time... If I saw someone in the trails, we manage the dogs first.”

Not all the participant felt that bringing their dog had an impact on social connection, Paige explains *“There’s no difference [whether I bring my dogs or not] because if I don’t know the people- polite greeting and move on, if I do know them, I would perhaps stop and talk.”*

Human interactions give individuals a sense of belonging, and are critical for physical wellbeing (McConnell et al., 2011). This subtheme explored the idea that dogs had an impact on their owners’ social connections in nature. Most participants found that their dogs inspired more conversations with other nature users. In addition to talking to other trail users, Lily and Tina both stated that walking their dog in nature is an activity that they often participate in with family and friends.

Fitness and Physical Activity

As described in the literature review, it is well documented that dogs can act as a positive influence on their owner’s physical activity levels. Gabe felt that his dog has this impact on his life. *“I just wanted to spend time in outdoor space with her. ...When I was in the midst of taking classes and starting my research and times when I was very sedentary, and very much in front of a computer. Having [my dog], I walked every morning and I walked her at lunch- well I would do a big hike at lunch. Yeah, so I get way more outside time because of her.”* Most of the participants felt that their dogs positively influenced their physical activity levels. Participants also felt that their physical activity time in nature increased, due to their dogs. Nature provides additional physical literacy outcomes and aesthetic appeal to the known benefits of physical activity (Pasanen, Tyrvaainen, & Korpela, 2014).

Sidney, Paige, and Tina felt that their overall physical activity time had increased, but that spending time with their dog could change the type of activity they participated in.

Sidney mentioned, *“I would say, I'd say [my physical activity levels] probably increased – but, I mean it's tough because I used to race and train and all that stuff, so my framework with how I view and access nature has shifted with my dog.”* Paige felt that she might partake in a larger variety of activities if she did not share her nature time with dogs. *“I think I would still do the hiking, but maybe not quite as much. I might do more bike riding or gardening. But [if I didn't have dogs] I would still do difficult trails because they are more interesting.”*

Tina felt that her dogs kept her physical boundaries in check *“When I have the dogs, I think about their limits. I wouldn't say I always think about mine. If I was alone I might not stop and take breaks, I would push myself and just, hike all day. But with the dogs, I want to make sure that they are safe and happy... But overall, I think my amount of [physical] activity time increases with the dogs. The number of times I go out increases, but sometimes the activity in one time decreases.”*

Lily appreciated that her dog has the ability to partake in nature activities. She finds that her physical activity levels increase, because she wants to have those experiences with her dog. *“I want to take her with me- because she is very active and she can keep up. She can run with me for hours, and it is so much fun.”* Stephanie also noticed that her dog's ability level influences her personal activity levels. *“Absolutely, stages when I haven't had a dog or stages when one of my dogs has been elderly or injured, you know you're physical activity fizzles almost to nothing.”*

Research shows that dog ownership is associated with higher levels of physical activity (Westgarth, Christley, & Christian, 2014). In this study, most of the participants sensed that their dogs positively influenced their fitness. While interviews indicated that overall

activity time in nature increased, some participants mentioned that their dog limited the variety of outdoor activities they participated in. Paige mentioned that she might bike more if she didn't have a dog, and Sidney said that before he had a dog he spent more time climbing.

The findings were influenced by the fact that participants had to identify as being active nature users. This meant that all of the participants were individuals who spent a great deal of time in nature (at least 6 hours/week). For the general public, increases in physical activity levels due to dog ownership might be more pronounced.

Findings also showed that individuals felt their dog's physical activity was improved from spending time in the wilderness. In natural space, dogs are able to run freely- increasing physical activity levels.

It is well documented that physical activity is linked to positive health outcomes. Participation in regular, moderate-intensity, physical activity is associated with important health benefits. These benefits include: weight management, decreased risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes, reduced blood pressure, and a decrease in musculoskeletal pain (Hoerster et al., 2011). Because spending time in nature with one's dog can positively impact activity levels, an outcome of this activity may be improved health.

Mental Restoration

Spending time in nature with their dog impacted participants' feelings of mental restoration, peace, and clarity. Lily feels like spending time in nature is an essential part of

her life. *“It is a necessity for me and for my health. There's something so freeing and relaxing, and being in wild spaces I get a sense of calm and it's reviving.”* Chloe ventures into the wilderness with her dogs, to gain a sense of clarity.

“It is definitely what I am looking for when I go. I feel more relaxed and like, less cluttered in my mind. I can actually let go of things and I do not think about what needs to be done or dealt with [outside of the space]. ... I don't know if I would feel the same connection to nature if I didn't have dogs. It is kind of fun to watch them sniff at little things that make me stop and look at those things. Or they will sniff up a tree and it makes me stop and notice that tree, and I will take the time to see details or admire its size. So I think that the dogs do influence my connection to spaces.”

For Margo, being in nature is *“Wonderful. It is decompression. Sharing the space with my dog compounds those feelings by a million times.”* Because Margo works in a stressful industry, she feels that she really needs time in nature to feel balanced. Gabe also appreciates the restoration he feels in natural space. *“I find those spaces calming. They give me an opportunity to think and reflect. My thoughts slow down and I walk slower and I think about my thesis and my writing or creative writing times when I can think through problems or barriers that I might have that I haven't had a chance to work through.”*

Sidney also sensed an immediate change in himself when he is in nature. *“For me, I feel most settled and most calm and my stress just flows away if I'm out in the middle of the woods. It could be even just going to Mystic Vale. Because you're so insular there it's just like you're cruising through there and it's just you and the trees in the dirt.”*

Tina shared thoughts on her dog assisting her mental wellbeing. *“I've had her since she was a puppy and so her and I have been through a lot together and I feel like she definitely plays a big role in my like, self care and mental health.”*

A consistent theme throughout all interviews was a feeling of restoration, clarity, and calm when experiencing nature with a dog. Participants discussed that they felt intrinsically connected to the natural space around them. Research indicates that the landscape can be a source of spiritual inspiration (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999).

While not every participant described the way that their dog influenced the mental restoration they felt in natural space, these feelings are an outcome of being in the space in general. All the participants felt like their dogs had an impact on the time that they spent in these spaces, which directly attributed to the outcome of mental restoration.

Training and Bond

Experiencing nature with their dogs helped to reinforce the bond they felt with the animal. All eight participants gave heartfelt descriptions, of how seeing their relationship with a dog grow, develop, and become richer as a result of training and hiking made them feel. There was a sense of accomplishment in sharing a relationship that could thrive in wild spaces.

Paige highlighted this, describing her relationship with her dogs as *“Close, joyful, occasionally frustrating, I learn a lot from it, creative, I work hard at training my dogs and I get a real sense of accomplishment from that. It is challenging in the sense that anything*

worth doing is challenging.” In a similar viewpoint, Gabe felt excited when he took his puppy in nature and realized that she could be trusted to share the adventure.

“She was so small, and just had these little, stubby puppy legs. We were walking down to a point, and we were coming up to this big rock face, and I'm expecting to pick her up and she ran up the entire thing after walking way further than I expected her to because she refused to let me pick her back up. She wanted to walk after [our other dog] so she goes into the forest I have no idea how she's going to act. I don't know her well enough to know if she's going to take off or anything like that, and she stays with us the whole time. It was pretty special.”

Stephanie felt that wilderness space definitely influenced how she interacts with her dogs. *“I think there is a better bond [between us]. Yes, definitely a better bond. If you are going and doing something fun together, right, and relaxing together. [Participating in nature experiences] together really creates a special bond.”* Tina also noticed this bond. She felt that when she spends time in nature with her dogs, it changed the way that her and her dogs connected to each other. *“There is a sincere connection and a shared experience. So even though you can't communicate in language with your animal about what you are seeing, the shared experience I think builds that relationship together and builds that trust.”*

This mirrors Margo's experience. *“[Being in nature together] makes us a team. We are very together when we are in the outdoors. He is allowed to run off on his own, but he rarely goes out of my sight and always comes back. He has excellent recall, especially in the bush.”* Margo also felt a sense of pride and accomplishment, when she realized that the training work she does with her dogs was apparent in a wilderness setting.

“Today we were out in the bush together- and I can’t imagine why, but all of a sudden a doe was coming toward us. Instead of crossing over or going the other way- she was coming toward us. My dog is almost as big as her- and he exhibited great interest. But he did not move. He wouldn’t move away from me. I wasn’t sure if he was engaged, and I asked if he was listening and then I said “not yours” and his body drooped and relaxed and he came towards me. That is the closest he has been to a deer, and it was really exciting to know he focused on me. It meant that we are doing something right.”

Sidney appreciated that in the wilderness, he could work on training with his dog without the threat of traffic or other people.

“I think [that training] is easier actually, I think it is easier in nature because he listens better when we're further out. He does have that range so that when I do need him to do a certain task he is more apt to listen. Whereas if I'm kind of creating a barrier as far as he can travel, then he's more willing to push the boundaries just like a kid would, right. If he has got a set amount of freedom than his own limitations are going to keep him close by because he wants to be close to me too, but if I'm telling him “no you can’t do this or that” he is obviously going to test the boundaries. So, I think I would way rather be running with him off leash when were in a further setting where I don't really have to monitor his safety with roads or cars or anything like that.”

In addition to nature being a space where individuals can work on training and build bonds with their dogs, it can also act as a space that reaffirms the connection a person has with their dog. Tina mentions, *“it also then enhances that trust piece because every time they run off they've always come back. and even though it's it might be stressful at the time for me*

because I can't see them, and I don't know where they are, I have to rely on their senses and their knowledge in the fact that they love me. I then know that they want to come back. It means that I am going to have to let go of control a little bit, and know they're all right."

Reflecting on their experiences with their dogs in nature, many participants felt the wilderness time improved the bond that they shared with their pet. Upon analysis of the findings, this bond is an outcome of the experience. Taking part in activities together made them a team. Lily, Tina, and Sidney also referenced feeling that in the wilderness they felt their energy level align with their dog's energy level.

The findings also indicated that participants felt a sense of accomplishment from seeing the results of their work dog training. When a dog listens in the wilderness, where there are many distractions, it means they are truly responsive to their owner. It was exciting and rewarding to experience their dog listen and act as they were trained. Some participants also mentioned that nature created a positive location to work on training with their dog. Because they were far removed from hazards like traffic, they could test their dog's recall with fewer repercussions.

Memories

While people generally spend time in nature for the experience, the memories generated from the moment are important as well. Memories can provide feelings of warmth and safety at times when people are feeling down, and can act as inspiration to keep them moving forward during difficult times (Tahirovic & Jusic, 2016). With great emotion, each participant recounted moments in which they shared nature with their dogs; it was truly evident that these memories were a positive outcome of the experience.

Chloe shared a meaningful memory. *“I still, so clearly remember the first time my puppy went to the beach, where we had the whole beach to ourselves. I watched him follow his brother out in to the waves, and they were jumping and playing. It was so cool to see how animals appreciate nature in a lot of the same ways that humans can. I think most people would think that humans invented surfing, but seeing my dogs out there- they were totally surfing and playing in the waves. And having the beach to ourselves made it so special because it felt so natural. It is fun to see them when they are free like that.”*

Margo remembered the times that her dog made her laugh in nature. *“My dog is not a water dog. He doesn’t like standing in the water or swimming at all, water is something for him to do an agility jump over. So there is a creek running through the bush. My dog was running up and down the side of a creek, following another dog who was running through the creek, and he decided to do an agility jump over the river. He jumped up and collided with the other dog and then he landed on his face on the opposite bank, and ended up rolling in the water like a dork. It was just a split second, but it was so funny.”*

As well as being the source of the memory, participants could attribute that their dogs for brought them to spaces where they made memories. Paige explained *“my young dog always shares these joyful moments with me. I also remember once coming up the crest of a side trail and seeing something strange ahead. I stopped my dog, so that he didn’t go ahead- and then I realized that we were looking at a buck with fishnet on his antlers. It looked really strange. So I would never have gotten to see that if I wasn’t out hiking with my dogs.”*

Making these memories not only brought joy to the moment, but individualized each experience in nature. Tina and Chloe found that the dogs reminded them to capture

memories. Tina stated that *“I’m not really one that takes a ton of pictures of like myself in nature but I love seeing my dogs play in nature, and trying to capture it and get the right lighting and so you get to see the whole landscape of a setting in a photo with them.”*

Similarly, Chloe attributed many of her nature photos to her dogs. *“I love taking pictures of them when we are out- and I don’t know that I would take as many pictures of just the scenery as I do when I have the dogs- so I have more to look back on, and the photos help build memories.”*

A final outcome that participants experienced, was the lifelong memories that were generated from spending time in nature with their dog. As Dr. Seuss once said “Sometimes you will never know the value of a moment, until it becomes a memory.” The participants really valued the memories that they shared with their dogs in nature. These memories elicited an emotional response from participants, and in some cases, created a tangible way of looking back at the moment through photographs.

While it is impossible to quantify the impact of a memory as an outcome, the nature of this research allowed for meaning to be demonstrated through the emotions present in participant’s stories. It was evident that memories had a strong significance. Recounting stories came with laughter, smiles, and heartfelt emotions.

Theme Three Summary

The third theme relates to the third research question: what are the outcomes of spending time in nature with one’s dog? Findings highlighted what people took away from the experience of sharing nature with their dog. Individuals described the social connections that they build, the changes or shifts in fitness and physical activity, their

mental restoration, the improved training and partnership with their dog, and the everlasting memories that they share with their pet.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented stories from eight nature-using, adventure-dog owners. These narratives highlighted the unique emotions and experiences of spending time in nature with one's dog. Although their motivation for spending time in nature may have differed from one another, each individual truly felt that his or her experiences in nature with their dog(s) were meaningful and played a powerful role in the context of their life. The participants were very diverse, however; there were many thematic similarities in their stories. Quotations from transcribed interviews aided in the categorization of these three emergent themes. Themes were presented and described, in relation to the three research questions in this section. The next chapter will further discuss these themes, how they connect to prior literature, and recommend future research topics.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

Introduction

This study's purpose was to explore the experience of nature-using individuals who spend a great deal of time in nature with their dogs, and better understand how sharing the outdoors with their dog influenced their connection to the space. The findings presented in the previous chapter were drawn from a series of semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with eight participants. Chapter 5 will discuss these thematic findings and how they relate to research questions, and examine contributions, practical implications, and present future outcomes of the research.

Theme One: Heightened Nature Experiences

This study was about the lived experiences of nature users who spend over six hours a week in nature with their dogs. As presented in the findings, the theme was broken up into: physical awareness; mental focus; happiness; play & joy; and shared journey. These sub themes really illustrated the significance of sharing wild space with a dog. Although “heightened experience” was a stand-alone theme, it encompassed the other two themes. For example, when a participant negotiated constraints in the outdoors, this led to a heightened nature experience. Similarly, the outcomes that arose from nature experiences with a dog led to a heightened nature experience. Analysis of interviews and transcripts revealed that this theme connected to the first key research question regarding the essence of the experience of dog owners in nature.

Thinking about the essence of an experience involves uncovering what exactly makes certain experiences special, spectacular, and memorable (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). The

nature users interviewed were able to describe their connection towards nature, and the feelings that these spaces gave them. Consistently, people identified that nature made them feel calm, relaxed, clear, and at home. In many cases, people felt like their true self, or best self in wilderness settings.

Seven of the eight participants felt that their dog increased their physical awareness in nature environments. While this was true for most of the participants of this study, the age and ability level of the dog may be of importance. Gabe stated that he was less likely to notice his surroundings when his dog accompanied him in nature. Because his dog was a puppy, her training and behaviours took up the majority of his focus. A longitudinal study could be run with nature users who adopt puppies, to explore how their physical awareness in nature changes on walks with the puppy, as it grows older.

As well as influencing a person's physical awareness, dogs can shape the level of mental focus that participants felt in the wilderness. The researcher expected that dogs would have an influence on mental focus; however, little research was found to describe how focus would be influenced. Participants described 'staying in the moment,' which linked back to the idea of peak experience (Macdonald, Wearing, & Ponting, 2009). Future research could further explain how and if dogs trigger peak experiences.

Theme One Summary

In summary, each subtheme demonstrated a way in which spending time in nature with a dog can heighten a person's nature experience. Whether this is through physical awareness, mental focus, happiness & joy, or through sharing the journey, most participants felt that bringing a dog improved their wilderness experience. These

heightened experiences illustrated what the essence of the experience of spending time in nature with one's dog was for research participants, and future research could help to illustrate how the themes interact independently.

Theme Two: Negotiating Constraints in the Outdoors

This theme illustrated the idea that dogs can impact the way that individuals negotiate constraints to the outdoors. Constraints are defined as factors that may inhibit activity participation or limit satisfaction (Jackson, 1988). Past articles in leisure constraint research was based on a conception of constraints as being insurmountable obstacles to participation in an activity. The body of literature is changing, however, and an alternative view of constraints presents the idea that participation in a leisure activity is dependent on the negotiation through constraints, not the absence of them (Jackson, Crawford, and Godbey, 2009). The overall theme was broken into four subthemes: safety, weather, energy levels, and logistics. This theme, and subsequent subthemes, outlines the influences that dogs have on negotiating constraints.

These responses informed the results to the second key research question: how is your nature experience different when you have your dog with you, as compared to when you do not.

Safety was an interesting sub theme, because it responses were split. While the literature predicted that participants would feel safer walking with a dog (Knight & Edwards, 2008), three participants felt that their dog positively impacted their feelings of safety, and four people felt that their dog negatively impacted their safety. One person did not report feeling a change in personal safety. Due to personal background, the researcher

expected that results around safety would be more robust. Findings might have varied due to the nature of the dog walking. Knight and Edwards (2008) discussed walking in an urban environment, where risks and safety considerations are much different than in wilderness settings. Findings may differ according to region, and wildlife threat as well.

Dogs assisted with the negotiation of both weather and energy levels. This aligned with the literature, which discussed that dog owners are motivated to walk their dogs due to a sense of obligation (Wharf Higgins et al., 2013; Brown & Rhodes, 2006; Hoerster et al., 2011).

The data on logistics represented additional constraints that must be negotiated in order to spend time with a dog in nature. Because participants worked through the constraints, their experience with a dog differed from their experiences in nature without a dog. The researcher anticipated that the additional constraints might have a larger impact on participants' actions. Interestingly, this was not the case. The additional constraints did not seem to dissuade individuals from bringing their dogs into nature. Chloe laughed, saying, *"it wouldn't be worth it"* to go on an adventure without her dogs.

Theme Two Summary

The subthemes worked to illustrate how participants negotiated constraints to the outdoors when they spent time in nature with their dogs. These constraint negotiations informed the second key research question: how is your nature experience different when you have your dog with you, as compared to when you do not? Having a dog helped participants navigate certain constraints, but added constraints in other circumstances.

Theme Three: Outcomes

Spending time in nature with a dog results in a variety of outcomes. These outcomes were divided into subthemes: social connection, fitness and exercise, mental restoration, health and wellness, and training and partnership. Findings in these subthemes demonstrated the effects of sharing adventures in the wilderness with a dog.

The third research question, how does spending time in nature with your dog contribute to your overall wellness, was found to be too focused to include the outcomes that participants' described. Because of this, the question was reworked to better reflect findings. What are the outcomes of spending time in nature with your dog?

While findings generally indicated positive social connection, some participants discussed the fact that their dog hindered interactions. This may be due to the friendliness, size, or breed of the dog. Graham and Glover (2014) found that the behaviours of a dog change the way that communities react to the dog's owner. Further research is needed to explore the relation of types of dogs to social interactions. Additionally, participants in this study for individuals that spent at least 6 hours a week in nature, with many participants spending hours each day. This population may have been more prone to spending time alone in nature. With a general population spending time in more cultivated space, the outcomes of social connection may have been different.

Thinking about this subtheme in regards to the research question, the social interactions one experiences while walking a dog in nature are certainly an outcome of the activity. While participants explained that interaction rarely went beyond a friendly greeting, a greeting in itself can build community and connect nature users.

It was unclear whether one's dog played a role in these feelings of restoration for many of the participants. Margo clearly stated that her dog helps her to feel relaxed and calm; however, many of the participants could not identify if their dog enhanced the mental restoration provided by nature. The researcher expected findings to be more robust in this area. Further research may be able to study this in more detail.

A requirement of participating in this study was the ability to walk one's dog in an off leash capacity. This may have influenced findings, as individuals walking their dog on a leash may not have felt the same sense of accomplishment while participating in nature with their dog. Additionally, if a dog reacted negatively off leash, this may lead to feelings of failure. Dogs that react poorly can lead to negative interactions for their owners (Graham & Glover, 2014). More research is needed to further explore this topic.

Theme Three Summary

The subthemes described the outcomes that resulted from participants spending time in wilderness with their dogs. These outcomes informed the third key research question: What are the outcomes of spending time in nature with one's dog? Participants felt that personal wellness was impacted, they felt an improved bond to their dog, and were left with meaningful memories with their beloved pet. Findings in this theme aligned with previous research (Wharf Higgins et al., 2013).

Contributions, Practical Implications, and Future Recommendations

Contribution to Literature

This research has contributed to a growing body of literature on health, wellness, nature, and dog ownership, through the addition of the previously unconnected areas of nature-use and dog ownership. As mentioned throughout the study, there is literature that describes the outcome of spending time in nature (Sharma-Brymer & Bland, 2016; Hoerster et al., 2011) and there is literature that describes the impact of dog ownership (Brown & Rhodes, 2006; Westgarth, Christley, & Christian 2014; McCormack et al., 2016); however, there is no research that brings these related areas together. This study provided new depth through the inclusion of personal interviews. These participant recollections represent unique stories and attitudes about the lived experience of spending time with a dog in nature. Many of the findings support previous studies that outline the impact of both nature use and dog ownership. Therefore, this research strengthens the current literature by presenting consistent, unique findings using a phenomenological research method.

Research Implications

Population health is a growing concern in North America. Although research shows that time spent in natural settings improves health and wellness, recent years show a societal trend toward indoor, sedentary behaviours (McCurdy et al., 2010). Research on dog ownership outlines that dog owners typically have better health behaviours than non-dog owners have (Lim & Rhodes, 2016). With that said, studies also indicate that some dog owners do not walk their dogs (Cutt et al., 2007). The findings of this research could be used to encourage dog walking and ownership as an effective wellness strategy.

Because this study highlights the experiences that dog owners have in nature, the results may inspire current dog owners to spend more time in nature with their dogs. Dog owners feel that they have an obligation to take their dogs on walks (Brown & Rhodes, 2006), so perhaps the idea that these walks could include more happiness and joy and increase the training and bond felt between an owner and a dog would act as a motivator to dog owners. Additionally, dog-walking (or dog lending) programs could be implemented to inspire non-dog owners to spend time outdoors with a dog. Certain organizations exist that link dog owners with dog lovers to share their pet, in a mutually beneficial way. Increasing the amount of time that individuals spend in nature with a dog could have a positive impact on population health.

It was clear that the experiences that participants shared in nature with their dogs had a positive overall impact on their health and wellness. Lily considered this time *'a necessity'* for her health. While participants would agree that the experiences were transformative for them, there were also challenges. One of the greatest was dealing with the misuse of park space.

This research could inform park use practices. While a larger sample size would be required, this area of research could help researchers gain a better understanding of the experiences individuals have in nature with their dogs. In off leash areas, parks could be firm around the capabilities of off leash dogs. This would help individuals with dogs understand best practice around approaching other dog owners. Improved signage or guidelines around park use could create a safe and inclusive space for all park users.

Future Recommendations

Although this study was able to bring together two similar areas of research, and contribute a new voice to the experiences of nature using dog owners, there is still much to be learned. The current study conducted interviews with nature users who shared experiences with adventure dogs. Research that includes interviews from dog owners that leash walk their dogs, or from individuals that regularly walk with dogs in nature, but do not own them might generate different responses from the participants interviewed. Future research may benefit from the use of varied methods: such as participant observation during nature walks, or the inclusion of accelerometer or GPS data. These quantitative methods could describe other aspects of spending time in nature with a dog, adding to the findings from this phenomenological study.

A study researching the experiences of park users who are not dog owners may be a helpful addition to the literature. This viewpoint could offer a new dimension to the research, in understanding how dogs influences the experience of individuals spending time in nature without a dog. If an individual is hiking on a trail and comes into contact with another nature user and a dog, would sharing a brief interaction with the dog impact the person's personal experience? Research could highlight if there is a minimal amount of time that needs to be spent with a dog in nature in order to have it influence one's experience. Future qualitative studies could explore these questions could explore this side of nature-dog research.

The research intends to disseminate the results of this study in the following ways:

- Distributing the final study to all participants
- Publishing findings in a related academic journal

- Distributing short articles to local nature groups, and dog organizations

Delimitations

The researcher additionally understood that the following *delimitations* might have impacted the study:

1. Participants interviewed were all current nature users
2. Study focused only on owners of adventure dogs, and not all dog owners
3. Participants interviewed were all residents of the Greater Victoria Area, and were English speaking.

Conclusion

This study explored the essence of spending time in nature with one's dog. The researcher interviewed nature users that spend an excess of six hours a week in nature with their dog(s). Through the analysis of these qualitative interviews, three themes arose: heightened experiences, negotiating constraints, and outcomes. These themes were further broken up into a number of sub themes. Through explaining the themes using the stories and experiences of the participants, the researcher was able to inform the three key research questions. The findings and discussion illustrated the phenomenon of spending time in nature with one's dog, which added more depth to the literature in the following research areas: nature, dog companionship, health, and wellness.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Poster



**Do you spend
more than 6 hours/week in
nature with your
dog?**

**Does this influence
your connection
with nature?**

I am completing my Master's Degree in Kinesiology at the University of Victoria, researching the experience of being in nature with one's dog. I will be conducting interviews with participants who are avid nature users and spend over 6 hours/week in nature with their canine adventure pal.

If this sounds like you and you are interested in sharing your story- I would love to meet you for a short interview.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Please contact me via:



**University
of Victoria**

Appendix B: Email Script

Hello _____,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research project, exploring the experiences of dog owners in nature. As a student completing my masters in kinesiology at the University of Victoria, I am required to complete research. This will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. John Meldrum.

As a requirement for participation, you must self identify as a person who spends at least 3 days per week (2 hour sessions) in nature with your dog. Your dog must be able to walk with you in wild spaces, on an off-leash capacity.

This is an exciting opportunity, because this area of research is relatively unexplored and your participation will add to the overall knowledge, and may help inform individuals who are looking to spend more time in nature.

Participation will include an interview that will take ~1 hour, and after the interview I will check back to insure that the themes drawn from the interview are true to your feelings.

Your participation will be voluntary and anonymous. You can withdraw from the research at any time, and personal identifying details will be changed your omitted in the research.

I hope that you will feel excited to share your stories about spending time in nature with your dog. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Katelyn Kennedy

MSc Kinesiology Student, University of Victoria

Appendix C: Consent Form

**School of Exercise, Physical and Health
Education, University of Victoria**

Participant Consent Form

An Exploratory Study of Dog Owner's Experiences in Nature

You are invited to participate in a study entitled "An Exploratory Study of Dog Owner's Experiences in Nature" that is being conducted by Katelyn Kennedy.

Katelyn Kennedy is a graduate student in the department of Exercise, Physical and Health Education at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by email.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Kinesiology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. John Meldrum, director of the school of exercise, physical and health education. You may contact my supervisor by phone.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to explore the experiences of individuals who experience nature with their dogs, in order to find meaning and gain insight in the experience of spending time in nature with one's dog, and better understand the impact of this phenomenon.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because it explore a subject that is not well researched. Past authors of studies focusing on nature connectedness and dog ownership have indicated that more research is needed in order to provide rich and meaningful data, and to further investigate the evolving topics. This research will add to the state of knowledge in the area of recreating with dogs, and hopefully inform future research in the area.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as an individual who actively spends time in wild areas with your pet dog.

What is involved?

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include an interview with the researcher that will be (audio) recorded and transcribed later for analysis. Field notes will also be taken, which will be reviewed along with the recordings and collected data.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, as participation will require a time commitment. The study will require you to be interviewed for approximately one hour.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include adding to the overall state of knowledge that can be used to inform future researchers studying nature and dog ownership. Society could benefit by having an increased focus on wellness and nature connectedness, and by understanding how dogs can influence these broad subjects. More people could see themselves spending more time in nature, and bringing a pet into wild space. Increasing the amount of time people spend in the outdoors could have an effect on their overall health making them less likely to suffer stress, mental health issues, physical distress and more.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be withdrawn and returned to you, or used only with the express consent of the participant.

On-going Consent

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will continue to check in with you throughout the interview process. For privacy reasons, the names of each participant will be changed in the analysis of the research.

Anonymity

Anonymity will be protected in dissemination of the research as each person will be given an alias, however, due to the face to face nature of the interview, complete anonymity is not possible. Any identifying details will be changed or omitted to protect anonymity.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by the use of an alias, as well as data stored on password protected electronic devices. Paper files will be stored in a locked cabinet. Paper files will be destroyed by shredding and electronic files will be deleted after a waiting period.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways through a published graduate thesis on the University website, as well it is the authors intent to publish the research in a scholarly journal and present the findings in seminar, or conference settings.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include:

Katelyn Kennedy: principal researcher and graduate student at the University of Victoria.

John Meldrum, graduate student supervisor, director of the school of EPHE at the University of Victoria

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix D: Priority Interview Questions

How often do you spend time in nature with your dog?

Which type of nature spaces do you spend the most time in?

Can you talk about how these natural spaces make you feel?

Is this a feeling you seek out in nature? Or do you notice these feelings upon reflection?

Discuss your connection to wild space.

How long have you had your dog?

How would you describe your relationship with your dog?

What makes your dog an adventure dog?

What does the term adventure dog mean?

How much of your time spent in nature is spent with your dog?

What influences your decision to take your dog with you?

What are some challenges you encounter when you bring your dog?

How is your experience in nature different when you have your dog with you, vs. when you go without him/her?

How do you feel after spending time in nature with your dog?

Explain what you notice in yourself and your dog when spending time in nature together?

Does the space where you walking your dog impact your experience on a dog walk?

Does bringing your dog influence your connection to other people in wild spaces?

Have you noticed an impact on your health or your dog's health from spending time together in nature?

Can you describe your favourite memory in nature with your dog? What makes this moment stand out?

Appendix E: Ethical Approval



ethics@uvic.ca

Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
Administrative Services Building RM 202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC
Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research |

Date: December 15, 2017

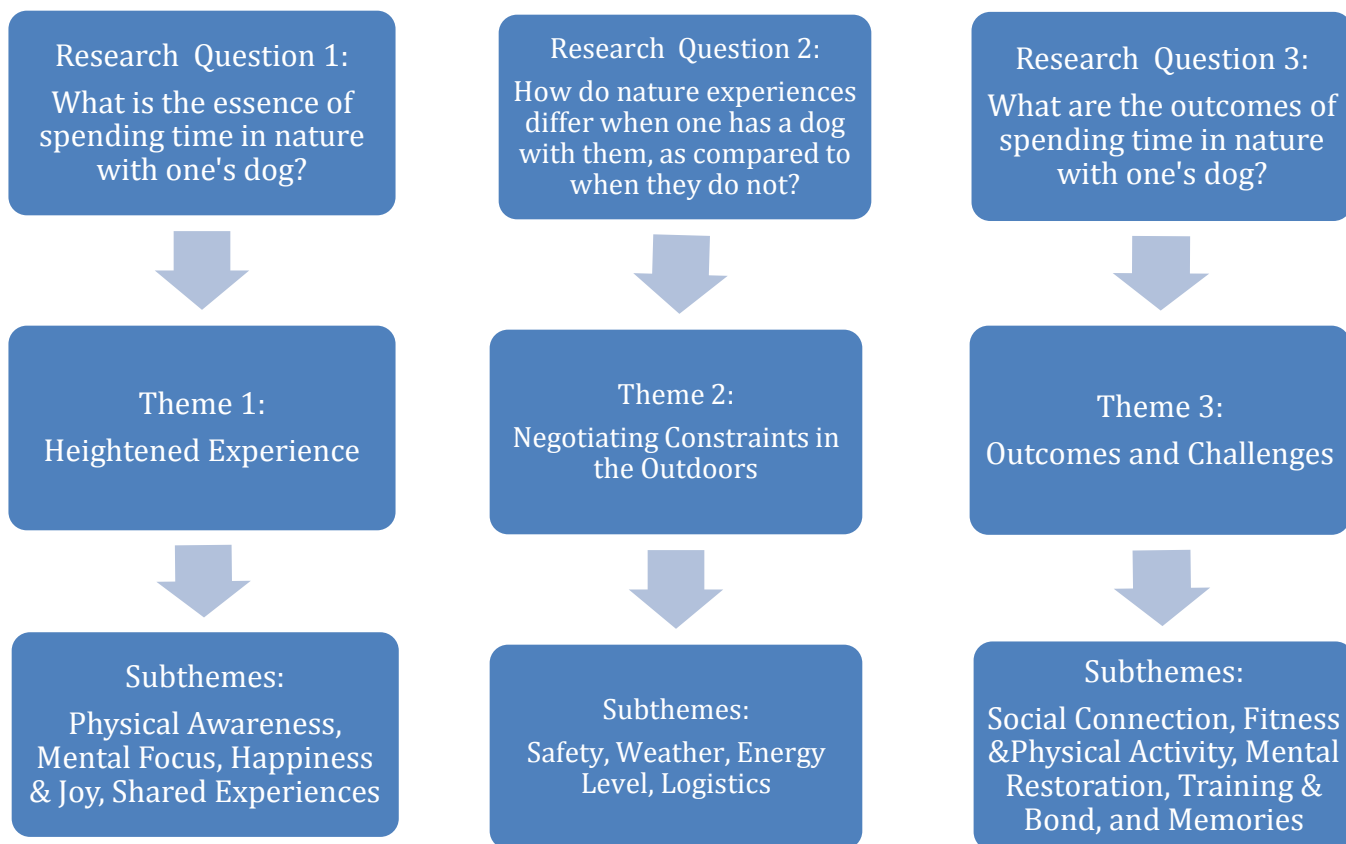
Notice of Ethical Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: KATELYN KENNEDY

PROJECT TITLE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF DOG OWNER'S EXPERIENCES
IN NATURE

ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER: 17-438

The board has reviewed and approved the protocol for your proposed study. You may commence your research, and you will receive a *Certificate of Approval* via regular mail.

Appendix F: Research Questions, Themes, and Subthemes

Appendix G: Theme Development