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Multispecies Partnership: An Analysis of Human-Animal Relationships within Equine-Assisted Therapy Programs

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Contents

Introduction

The historical western Eurocentric view of the human-animal relationship (HAR) was built on hierarchies that privileged humans over animals and centred the desire for ownership and power over other species (Robinson, 1999; Matamonasa-Bennett, 2015; van Dierendonck et al., n.d.). Newer scholarship, however, emphasizes alternative views that are working to identify to what degree animals' natural way of life is impacted by human interaction (Gorman, 2019). Domesticated animals, including livestock, are required to engage with humans on demand, even though most animals naturally prefer isolation from humans (Gorman, 2019). Certain industries, such as care farms and zoos, capitalize on human-animal encounters, while reducing animals to objects as they are expected to adhere to Eurocentric norms of presentability, both in behaviour and appearance (Gorman, 2019), a process Yarwood and colleagues refer to as "sanitisation" (2000, p. 106). Industries that focus on the use of animals for human benefit exemplify anthropocentric views, whereby value is placed on human needs and desires (Kopnina et al., 2018), and animals' opportunities to flourish are reduced in service to those needs (Gorman, 2019). Gorman (2019) uses the term "parasitizing siphoning" to theorize the ways in which non-human opportunities are severely diminished for human gain (p. 313).

The study of human-animal relationships (HAR) is extensive. Echeverri and colleagues (2018) suggest two categories for understanding these relationships: material, referencing those that are physical nature; and non-material, "the intangible dimensions … that are psychological, philosophical, social, and spiritual" (p. 51). There is a prioritization of human needs within these intangible dimensions that strongly influences how humans define and engage with animals, reducing animals' value and directly impacting the well-being and quality of non-human life. Integrated within this discussion of HAR are human-animal interactions (HAI), defined as any

encounter, physical or figurative, between animals and humans (Echeverri et al., 2018). To further understand the nature of HAR/I, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) provides a lens to deepen our understanding while fully considering contributions made by all human and non-human participants within these relationships: “By complementing more traditional views of agency with that of ANT, we widen our lens and begin to perceive the agency of non-humans and their relational effects on human intentionality” (Dwiartama et al., 2014). It is within these frameworks that my research is situated.

This project is positioned within historical and contemporary conversations about relational engagement between humans and animals, specifically humans and horses, with a focus on domesticated working horses within equine assisted therapy programs. Non-working or non-domesticated horses are outside the scope of this project, and therefore not included within observational data obtained by working in partnership with TEAD Therapeutic Riding Centre. The purpose of this research is to enhance understandings of human-animal relationships and interactions, specific to equine-assisted therapy (EAT) programs and volunteer training. Through my creative contribution, I aim to identify and deconstruct anthropocentric views and acknowledge contributions made by all actors, human and non-human. I acknowledge contributions made by non-human participants by focussing on human-animal relationships, paying specific attention to interactions between volunteers and therapy horses in equine-assisted therapy programs. This work contributes to social justice by deconstructing hierarchies between humans and the rest of the natural world while focussing on ethical relationality between and among species, specifically in relation to commensal and mutualistic relationships.

The data in this project is derived from a synthesis of existing human-animal relational research, from the consideration of my own experiences at TEAD Therapeutic Riding Centre,

and from participant observation in the field. Drawing from my seven-month 160-hour volunteer experience at TEAD, November through May, and a content analysis of comparator EAT facility training resources, I have brought these data together to support TEAD by creating an evidence-based online resource that has a specific focus on volunteer-horse interactions. This resource, which serves as the creative component of this project, works toward the goal of improving HAR for the horses engaged in EAT. As such, this project sought to answer the research question: How do current anthropocentric views of human-animal relationships influence relationality between humans and therapy animals?

Contextualizing the Creative Major Research Project

TEAD Therapeutic Riding Centre is a bustling equine assisted therapy facility with year-round programming, approximately fourteen therapy horses, a modest staff compliment, and an estimated two-hundred volunteers. Horses are fed and turned-out, stalls and tack are cleaned daily, and programming is supported by dedicated volunteers who are passionate about helping others and animal advocacy. The direction and design of my creative MRP project stems from the realization that therapy facilities require devoted and confident volunteers who can actively participate within a system that values reciprocity when working in concert with therapy animals. TEAD's current training program consists of a one-time, in-person training session, paired with a robust volunteer handbook. In an effort to enhance TEAD's current practices, my goal was to design an evidence-based resource that supports existing volunteer training efforts, while catering to volunteers' diverse learning styles. The creative project developed into a 33-minute expert panel video. The panel is comprised by three people with differing experiences at TEAD: Ellen, a TEAD Instructor/Trainer; Deb, Barn Manager; and myself, as a recent volunteer new

recruit. Panelists were chosen to provide a variety of perspectives while also representing people working within the industry for a number of years. The intent was to keep the panel concise in order to encourage a complementary, interview-style, flow of information that did not contain too much overlapping content. I also wanted to keep the video consumable in length to encourage volunteers to engage with the entire resource. This resource equips volunteers with information related to common equine communication behaviours while familiarizing volunteers with the horses they are working with. In encouraging volunteers' awareness of horses' comfort and discomfort, enhanced outcomes are experienced within the dynamics of human-animal interactions (HAI), where both human and non-human participants benefit.

There is potential for this resource to be the first of a series of TEAD training videos focused on multi-species relationships that emphasize partnership over hierarchy. It is my hope that TEAD continues to create volunteer training resources that focus on the well-being of the horses, in the ways noted by Echeverri and colleagues (2018), to improve the quality of non-human life and HAI. Upon watching the video resource created for this project, volunteers benefit from understanding how their human-animal interactions set the tone for facility programming and how they can improve experiences for the horses. Intention is required to change Eurocentric views that are deeply entrenched within equine industry policies, processes, language, and priorities. Ethical relationships, and improved training resources, require the formalization of practices that benefit human and non-human participants equally.

What is Equine-Assisted Therapy?

Since TEAD is an organization that focusses on equine-assisted therapy, it is important to outline the processes and practices involved in this type of therapy. Equine Assisted Therapy

(EAT) is a style of therapy within Animal-Assisted Therapy programs (AAT), that conducts interactions between horses and humans as a means to provide physical, mental, cognitive, or social therapy for human participants. Programs are offered in both mounted (riding the horse), and unmounted (from the ground) styles, and are designed to encourage progression for clients based on their needs and abilities. TEAD provides options for 6–10-week programs to customize opportunities for individuals or groups, based on their desired outcomes. As noted on the TEAD website, "Horses are one of the largest domestic prey animals and provide an opportunity for us to interact with a physically powerful, yet incredibly sensitive, receptive, and accepting animal. Through these interactions we build connections, trust, and long-lasting friendships" (TEAD).

Numerous industries benefit from understanding Western anthropocentrism as the foundation of the human-animal relationship. Those industries include animal-assisted therapy (AAT) and equine-assisted therapy programs, growing fields that use animals as aids for human gain (Gorman, 2019; Hatch, 2007; Matamonasa-Bennett, 2015). Animals funneled into therapy facilities are trained, handled, and expected to behave in highly specific ways in support of physical, emotional, and cognitive challenges faced by human participants. This arrangement requires extreme soundness of therapy animals, while maintaining a rigorous schedule both physically and mentally. Soundness is a term used by humans working with horses to define the way a horse physically and mentally responds to sudden stimulation such as loud noises or movements. In this equation, a horse is sound when it does not react, or responds in a way that aligns with human needs. In an EAT setting, horses are required to be extremely patient, friendly, giving, and desensitized to sounds, movements, or objects that would otherwise scare a horse unfamiliar with the program.

Within the last two decades, research has expanded to consider the ethical treatment and general well-being of animals within therapy programs (Matamonasa-Bennett, 2015; DuBois, 2018; Lund, 2006; Gorman, 2019; Hatch, 2017; Kaiser, 2006; Shapiro, 2017) in an attempt to deconstruct the anthropocentrism that places human needs above those of horses. Instead of viewing animal participants as mere tools for human betterment and without needs of their own, they are viewed as equal partners with their own needs that must be considered at all times. These approaches are cooperative rather than hierarchical.

EAT programs typically assign volunteers to each client and horse team based on the needs of human participants. Volunteer support can include up to three volunteers per client for the duration of the lesson as volunteers take on the roles of leader and side-walker. Leaders focus on supporting the horse by guiding the horse on behalf of the client through various patterns and games within the arena space. Side-walkers focus on the client while providing physical, emotional, and verbal support to ensure stability and enjoyment throughout the lesson. This multi-person scenario amplifies concerns regarding human-animal interactions due to the number of humans that horses are required to interpret and respond to at one time. In the expert panel training resource, Ellen, TEAD trainer, reiterates how much a therapy horse has to observe within a session: the instructor, client, leader, side-walkers, and any "outward" disturbances happening at the time of the lesson (see Appendix C for full panel transcripts).

Positionality and Experience with TEAD

I have had the opportunity to interact with horses most of my life through a deep family history of working with horses. I have learned from family mentors active in sport and recreational horse communities, while also spending time with various breeds of horses. In

addition, and in-sync with this project, I have recently adopted a horse that my family and I are enjoying, as we ensure her needs and well-being are prioritized with the goal of encouraging reciprocity. My personal experiences resonate with learning opportunities that are enhanced when a positive environment, built on respect and care for all participants, is fostered.

Over a seven-month period, November through May, and 160 hours of observation, I participated in weekly lesson programs through the care of horses pre- and post-lessons, in regulating horse behaviour throughout lessons, and in providing physical and emotional support for clientele. Through observation, I have become increasingly aware of the unique relationship between EAT volunteers, clientele, instructors, and therapy horses. As Finkelstein (2022) says, "each individual must become part of a cohesive unit, moving, thinking, and communicating together through ritualized practice" (p. 628). In this case, the "unit" represents each pairing of horse to rider and volunteers, and "practice" refers to the lesson space and activities taking place. EAT volunteers require a heightened level of horse behaviour awareness in order to adequately support programs while reading and supporting communication between horse and rider (Finkelstein, 2022). The parameters of this research focuses specifically on the volunteer to therapy horse interaction, due to observed gaps within existing training practices. Volunteers are an integral part of the EAT unit and due to the high volume of volunteers required to support programming creating countless volunteer to horse interaction points, and elevated volunteer turnover rates, extending volunteer training practices to include equine behavioural and communication cues encourages positive relationality between volunteers and therapy horses,

Summary

This project and its creative outcome support human-animal relationships developing from

a place of reciprocity, where the well-being of participants, human and non-human, is considered equally at all times. Human-animal interactions take place in personal, recreational, or professional settings, and there is opportunity to consider the knowledge, and identify the biases, humans carry into each interaction. Throughout my time at TEAD, an organization that strives to equally consider the needs of therapy horse participants, I have observed to what extent awareness and intention ensure the well-being of therapy horses. Volunteer training practices are an important part of this equation and EAT practices would benefit from enhancing existing and future volunteer training resources to intentionally deconstruct anthropocentrism, starting from day one of volunteer training.

Literature Review

Equine Assisted Therapy

Snowshoe (2016) emphasizes how EAT is designed around the natural intuitiveness of horses and their ongoing sensitivity to human behaviours and actions. Likewise, Finkelstein (2022) considers the way horses are expected to respond to all actors within an EAT session: "they are attuned to the people around them, both in terms of their riders as well as the team of volunteers and trainers who co-run the lessons" (p. 632). Finkelstein (2022) also acknowledges that horses are skilled teachers and therefore EAT should not be about control over horses, but rather about partnership between horses and humans. Kaiser (2006) further adds to the discussion by bringing attention to how these interactions may cause stress to horses if human participants and/or the setting are not attuned to the needs of the horses. These perspectives exemplify the need to share knowledge with volunteers on common horse behaviours, how to read them, and

the best way for volunteers to respond within those situations to ensure that both humans and horses are being appropriately cared for.

Human-Animal Relationships

Analysis of human-animal relationships provides understanding of how this multi-species relationship has historically functioned within both European and Indigenous societies, and how the field of human-animal studies (HAS) has expanded over time. Matamonasa-Bennett (2015) categorizes human-animal relationship (HAR) into three categories: utilitarian (where animals are viewed as serving human need); stewardship (representing the needs of both humans and animals); and liberationist (putting an end to animal exploitation). Gorman (2019), too, argues that utilitarian perspectives elevate humans over non-humans, which he theorizes as parasitism—a relationship where one participant (the human) benefits at the cost of another (the animal). The concept of parasitism stems from Serres' research which argues that exploitation is present during all acts of exchange in "social, cultural, and technological mediation" (Enns, 2009, p. 170). This exploitation occurs by way of interception and taking from another, unsettling regular function, or disrupting regular function entirely and creating alternative behaviours (Gorman, 2019). For the purposes of this research, stewardship relationships best characterize TEAD's aims as they seek to move away from utilitarian approaches.

Shapiro (2017) argues that the field of human-animal relationships (HAR), by its very nature, is human-centered while animals remain faceless and voiceless. Decentering humans within HAR requires the deconstruction of anthropocentric views that are encouraged by Western hierarchical perspectives. Unfortunately, a robust colonial history of animal and land ownership defined by power has privileged anthropocentrism in European understandings of

HAR (Robinson, 1999; van Dierendonck, n.d; Snowshoe et al., 2016). Specific to human-horse relationships, Showshoe and colleagues (2016), argue that colonial outlooks prioritize humans while “trivializing” contributions made by horses, which is symbolic of the power and dominance espoused by colonial forces (p. 67).

Opportunities to interact with animals have expanded greatly as people participate in various forms of well-being and volunteer work, such as animal-infused yoga classes, or volunteer work on farms, shepherding, or “lookering” --the observations of livestock to ensure their welfare (Adams et al., 2021, p. 166). In Canada, human observation of animals was traditionally reserved for racetracks or zoos but has now expanded to include ‘holistic’ practices that sell a sense of human integration into natural spaces (Adams et al., 2021). Many Westerners capitalize on HAI with wellness serving as a buzz word to upsell these opportunities. Within this expansion of animal-human therapies lie questions about how human interaction impedes upon animals’ natural ways of life. After all, to what extent would animals naturally choose these activities and settings? To answer they would not choose to, suggests the need for human dominance in order to contain animals within these spaces (Hatch, 2007; Ward et al., 2018). Many non-Western views focus on deconstructing these anthropocentric views and look to their own traditional understandings of human accountability with stewardship as the priority (Snowshoe et al., 2015).

Interdisciplinary research, prioritizing, for example, Indigenous ways of knowing and being, is making strides in changing anthropocentric views of HAR through animal welfare science, which is used to determine the outcomes of these relationships for both humans and animals (Ward et al., 2018). This research is especially timely with the increase in therapeutic HAI opportunities. Animal welfare science brings together the benefits of interdisciplinary

perspectives to gain knowledge that will heighten the quality of animals' lived experiences (Lund, 2006). Horses have been at the centre of HAI because of their extreme versatility, distinctive in comparison to other domesticated animals (DuBois, 2018). Geneticists are working to confirm that horses have been domesticated for approximately 6000 years, important historical information when considering how the colonization of horses has impacted human life, from warfare and transportation to current forms of HAI (Williams, 2012). Equally important to consider is how long humans have been changing the trajectory of horses lives through domestication.

Human-Animal Relationships in EAT

Equine-assisted therapy (EAT) programs are important to observe for their unique human-horse relationships as numerous volunteers, trainers, and clientele interact with therapy horses daily. Barns are not natural horse habitats but given the extensive history of domestication of these animals, companion or livestock, there is opportunity to learn how HAI impacts the well-being of therapy horses (DuBois, 2018). Furthermore, this research inquires to what extent therapy locations create environments of reciprocity between humans and non-humans, since many researchers advocate for alternative therapy program designs that are a more caring alternative to dominant Western views that prioritize humans over animals (Matamonasa-Bennett, 2015; Snowshoe, 2016). Ultimately, horses need to be seen less as objects of human healing and more as subjects in their own right, centralizing the ethical involvement of animals in therapeutic programming (Showshoe, 2016). In addition, creating awareness as to how horses participate in therapy settings through physicality, movement, and communication, influences the safety and experiences of all participants, human and non-human alike (Finkelstein, 2022).

Acknowledging the collaboration between horse and rider, including the role of volunteers, is a goal toward which research and humancentric perspectives can strive with intentionality (Finkelstein, 2022). Embracing symbiosis and reciprocity within policy development at organizations such as TEAD, emphasizes trust development within human-animal interactions (Finkelstein, 2022).

Communication between humans and non-humans is a logical place to start when considering animal advocacy, especially since this communication is bidirectional with both human and animal interpretations and emotions (Bull, 2014). Horses rely on blunt communication styles between each other and all others they encounter. Shapiro (2017) describes this communication style simply: “what they express is what they feel, what you see is what you get” (p. 5). As far as we know, horses do not ascribe to the same layered social interpretations as humans (Shapiro, 2017). When facilitating horse-human interactions, humans need to be mindful of keeping their own feelings in check to make space for horse-behavioural cues that indicate how the horse is responding to certain behaviours or actions. Reflexivity becomes key here as, first, humans have to recognize when they are letting their own desires and feelings override the space and time with which they engage with animals, therefore missing valuable cues and insights into the animals’ own experiences (Kirksey et al., 2010). The ways in which horses communicate could serve as signals to improve the experience of the animal within the therapeutic encounter.

Anthropocentrism and EAT

Anthropocentrism, which Taylor and colleagues define as, “the automatic privileging of human interests over all other animals” is fundamental to understanding hierarchies and the

reproduction of inequalities between humans and horses (Taylor et. al., 2014, p. 138). When we consider Eurocentric human-horse relational history, anthropocentric views are found at its core. Robinson (1999) argues this relationship transformed once it was determined that horses could carry humans and streamline labour (p. 42). With the growing popularity of animal-assisted therapy programs, we are witnessing another example of how humans capitalize on the natural abilities of horses, both through forms of therapy with human clients, but also as revenue generators in business practices. As noted by Robinson (1999), there is a rich history and wide range of understandings, including "economic drives" that stimulate human-centered relationships, especially when horses are subjected to "less talented/empathetic members of human society" (p. 72).

DuBois (2018) also discusses the "unique niche" of modern-day horse companionship whereby horses become pets, due to the nature by which some owners treat horses as an extension of their family (p.11). The way an owner views a horse directly correlates to how the horse will be interacted with, cared for, and managed (DuBois, 2018). Therefore, when we consider the opportunity to learn and benefit from horses through EAT interactions, participants need to identify their personal biases and understandings in order to deconstruct potential anthropocentric views. Given the layers of human contact experienced by horses within each lesson: volunteers, instructors, and clients; each member of that "cohesive unit" needs to consider how they view their roles and interactions within the "ritualized practice" (Finkelstin, 2022, p. 628).

Indigenous Perspectives on the Human-Animal Relationships

Although, due to its small scope and time constraints, this project does not partner with

Indigenous communities, it is essential to the conversation to understand the ways in which many Indigenous communities have understood human-animal relationships. Indigenous views often offer perspectives of nature, animals, and the environment that place non-human life as equal to and in relationship with human life. For some cultures, in resistance to colonialism, anthropocentric views have never been adopted. These ways of understanding human-animal relationships suggest a major overhaul is necessary to Western utilitarian perspectives in order to create sustainable and healthy futures (Matamonasa-Bennett, 2015; Snowshoe et al., 2016). Many Indigenous worldviews contradict Western views by highlighting the necessity of interconnectedness and interdependence as key to survival and sustainability. Power exists within nature which is deserving of respect and accountability from humans. Harmony is achieved when equal consideration is given to humans, non-humans, and the natural world (Matamonasa-Benett, 2015). Shifting to a perspective of interconnectedness requires a paradigm shift in Western European views: a move towards reciprocity and ethical stewardship in "authentic shared space" (Snowshoe et al., 2015, p. 73). Western perspectives individualize humans, disconnecting them from the earth, while ignoring the impact we collectively have on shared spaces with non-humans and the environment. Recognizing this disconnect is key to correcting the imbalance within Western colonial human-animal relationships.

Various Indigenous creation stories provide a deep spiritual understanding of the interdependence between humans and non-humans, for example as told in *Braiding Sweetgrass* through Skywoman's celebrations of earths' creation, as the "alchemy of all the animals' gifts coupled with her deep gratitude … formed what we know today as Turtle Island, our home" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 4). This creation story showcases the ways in which many Indigenous communities' views encapsulate interconnectedness and reciprocity since creation is a story of

cooperation and cohabitation, not of hierarchy and dominance. Smith (2021) suggests that colonial "institutions of knowledge" create barriers to other conceptions of "knowing and understanding the world differently" (p. 279). The deconstruction of anthropocentric views is possible when learners understand that dominant Western knowledge is based on colonial and/or Eurocentric values. Volunteers, instructors, and clients in EAT programs can benefit from identifying such biases in order to equalize horses within EAT human-animal interactions, encouraging spaces of reciprocity and interconnectedness.

Commensal and Mutualism Relations

There are a number of relational styles to be considered in conjunction with HAR. For the purpose of this project, I have focused on commensal and mutualism relations which are more aligned with stewardship approaches. Commensal relations are defined by interactions where one actor benefits while the other actor does not; however, the non-benefitting actor does not experience harm (Gorman, 2019; Adams et al, 2021). Whereas in mutualism relations both actors benefit from "living together" (Gorman, 2019, p. 318). These two types of relations are critical to my analysis since they are the types of relations to strive for in ensuring that horses needs are equally considered within EAT settings.

Although human emotional desires may lead us to believe that mutualism is always achieved in horse-human relationships, itself an example of anthropocentrism, there is a need to consider to what extent EAT truly advances animal well-being. Perhaps these interactions solely benefit humans, but, even if this is the case, they should, at the very least, not cause harm to animals. Therefore, ethical considerations become important as we work to avoid utilitarian or parasitic relationships and strive toward commensal or mutually beneficial relationships. As

Gorman (2019) suggests, the horse-human relationship is “not a relationship of parity, but the relationship [can be] one of mutualism” (p. 318 & 320). Within AAT/EAT programs, it is important to consider how care can be extended for therapy animals, meeting basic needs, ensuring safety, focussing on rehabilitation, but also centering reciprocity. As suggested by Gorman (2019), perhaps there is a point where horses begin to take pleasure in interactions with humans if their needs have been met, and trust relationships remain fluent and considerate. Shifting away from singular to multi-dimensional views that consider what humans and non-humans provide to each other, enhances beneficial gain for all actors through cultivating an environment of reciprocity. There is potential within awareness and understanding of equine communication and behavioural cues that encourages such cultivation.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

In the context of my placement with TEAD, observing human-horse interactions was supportive of the TEAD community insofar as these observations allowed for the creation of improved policy and practice, and did not interrupt the atmosphere that TEAD works to facilitate throughout the organization. Using appreciative inquiry as a framework, participant observation and TEAD training materials provided insight and data for the research outcomes of the project. A content analysis was conducted to engage with observational reflections and written materials. Furthermore, by considering research that dovetails with my own lived experiences, my intent was to provide insight on human-horse relational learnings which could support the development of an evidence-informed digital resource that would be complementary to existing volunteer training practices. Observations were both inductive and deductive by nature, as entering into the

data collection phase post placement, allowed me to begin with general observations in mind, while the data collection phase created space and opportunity for new observations to be gathered. Deductive ideologies were also present related to personal lived experiences and time spent working with horses across three decades, including more recently, focused time with the adoption of a horse to the family.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this project is informed by human-animal relationship theory (HAR), while human-animal interaction (HAI) and actor-network theory (ANT) provide supporting lenses to guide the research. Appreciative Inquiry is used to reflect the partnership of working with a community organization, and in tandem with the goal of identifying potential training opportunities that can be addressed through resource development, adding to volunteer awareness and the intent of creating interactions between volunteers and therapy horses, reflective of trust and reciprocity.

Human-Animal Relationships

The study of human-animal relationships (HAR) identifies the impact animals have on human life (Shapiro, 2017), the impact humans have on animals, and the problems inherent in the prioritization of human need over animal wellbeing (Robinson, 1999; Gorman, 2019). Taylor and colleagues (2011) question assumptions pertaining to hierarchical human-animal relationships, while aligning their work with Indigenous views of interconnectedness: “If humans are no longer ‘the centre of the universe’ and if our relations with animals are much more complex than previously thought, then we need to study them in new—and diverse— ways; in

ways which continue to challenge us to re-think ‘our’ relationships with ‘them’” (p. 1). Gorman (2016), for example, suggests considering potential therapeutic qualities humans may provide to other species, describing animals as both “co-constituents and co-participants” in therapeutic programs (p. 35). Researchers like Taylor and colleagues and Gorman are broadening the scope of HAR by challenging humans to reconsider the way animals are viewed, and in understanding what humans bring to therapeutic settings for the benefit of animals.

Human-Animal Interaction

Likewise, human-animal interaction (HAI) theory was used to capture the mutual benefits of multi-species interactions, essential to the health and wellbeing of both humans and animals (Applebaum et al., 2021). Bull (2014) uses the metaphor of knots to describe the co-shaping of space, living together, and multispecies politics, calling it “a complex negotiation” that should not put humans at the centre of power (p. 79). These are “moments, places, and relationships that are so explicitly dominated by emotions that they cannot be ignored. Human-animal relations are no exception” (Bull, 2014, p. 77). Recently, HAI was used within COVID-19 pandemic research specific to isolation and the high levels of stress felt by humans. In this research, Hoy-Gerlack and colleagues (2020) articulate the multi-dimensional benefits of HAI, including animals’ ability to improve the “physical, emotional, psychological, and social spheres of human functioning” (p. 109). In these understandings the labour, physical, or social wellbeing provided by animals are often at the centre of human aid without any consideration of the impact on animals. For these reasons, combining HAR and HAI in my research, served as a theoretical framework to highlight the experiences and wellbeing of animals rather than reinforcing the

hierarchy of human needs over those of animals.

Actor Network Theory

Finally, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) provided another critical lens in conjunction with HAR and created space for understanding horses as central to the EAT dynamic. ANT integrates the agency of non-humans, identifying each participant in the EAT experience as an actor that has influence, establishes networks, and develops social order that is fluid within time and space (Dwiartama, et al., 2014). ANT centralizes non-human contributions rather than identifying their contributions as "passive resources at the disposal of humans" (Dwiartama, et al., 2014, p. 4). In an effort to decentralize human benefit over that of animals, ANT provides a framework that gives agency to animals, encouraging symbiosis between animals and humans within industries that often drive capitalism at the expense of animal welfare. Extending knowledge to include how these networks consider non-human perspectives stimulates advocacy for animal welfare. No longer does the "partnership" remain one-dimensional and hierarchical in nature when actors consider the experiences of all participants involved, especially the "intangible dimensions" created by human-animal interactions (Echeverri et. al., 2018; Hoy-Gerlack et. al. 2020).

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) considers all participants, human or non-human, while identifying how each agent influences relational dynamics (Dwiartama et. al., 2014; Shapiro, 2017). Elliot and colleagues (2016) reiterate that ANT focuses on "connections between human and non-human entities" in which each are seen as actors in their own right (para. 1). ANT gives value to the indispensable nature of HAR and emphasizes the essential contributions non-humans provide (Dwiartama et. al., 2014). There are so many ways in which animals support humans, recreationally, economically, through labour support, and emotionally. My research sought to

find ways to ensure that humans are also giving back to horses. As such, acknowledgement of horses as relational participants in EAT is a prerequisite for introducing symbiosis into the space. If humans continue to see themselves as superior within multi-species dynamics, the focus remains on humans, and not on the ethical and equal care and concern for animal actors.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is defined by Cooperrider and colleagues (2005) as "the cooperative, coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them" (p. 7). AI exists within strength-based perspectives and asks questions that are framed positively while linking the knowledge created within the research to growing future capacities (Cooperrider et. al., 2005). The AI framework resonates with the environment nurtured each day at TEAD as staff attempt to create optimal conditions for both humans and animals. It was essential that I create a volunteer resource that mirrors this positive approach and that is supportive of both the client experience and the well-being of horses. AI supports my desire to provide volunteer training designed to inform volunteers with limited horse experience in an effort to boost knowledge while improving interactions for and with horses. In acknowledging the importance of volunteer-horse interactions, we acknowledge how these interactions set the tone for lesson programs while creating environments of cooperation and reciprocity benefiting all actors. Appreciative inquiry guides the process of identifying what is done well in TEAD practices. In sharing existing research related to HAR, while also identifying areas of improvement in volunteer training practices and resources, the goal of this project was to improve mutualism between humans and horses at TEAD. Working with volunteers includes the necessity of inspiring participation. Through training resources and day-to-day mentorship,

TEAD volunteers continue to succeed through a desire to create interactions based on reciprocity with all human and non-human participants. This intensifies when volunteers become confident in identifying and responding to equine communication and behavioural cues.

Methods

Content Analysis

The methods used in this research include participant observation and content analysis of the materials TEAD uses for current volunteer practices, TEAD's website, website training resources from three additional EAT facilities based in Ontario, and participant and personal observations made during a seven-month placement and data collection timeframe. Content analysis is an unobtrusive means of collecting and analyzing secondary data from institutions and organizations (Silverman, 2015). Through discussions with my TEAD supervisor, I received copies of TEAD's existing content (volunteer handbook, volunteer training checklist, barn volunteer training manual, horse acquisition form, and the content of their website) with little disruption or cost to myself or the organization. All print and website TEAD training resources, as well as comparator website resources, were documented within a data spreadsheet where training and communication themes were identified. Through this process, I was able to confirm the gap in volunteer training practices related to horse communication and behavioral cues, both at TEAD, and with comparator resources.

Participant Observation

Content analysis was also combined with participant observation. Participant observation requires heightened sensitivity from the researcher who is, as Silverman (2015) notes, an "active

observer" since pertinent information might otherwise be overlooked by "casual" observers (p. 45). Participant observation allowed me to fieldnote what I heard and observed between volunteers, therapy horses, and external factors, without causing disruption. These observations included both situational and environmental factors directly impacting the volunteer-horse dynamic. Observations were made across a seven-month period equaling 160 hours, representing two distinct periods of time: 110 casual observational hours during placement while participating twice weekly including volunteer training time, November through March. The second observational period was focused data collection time equaling an additional 50 hours across a 10-week sessional period, March through May. During the data collection phase, observations were handwritten in a field notebook, and transferred to data spreadsheet where volunteer interactional themes were highlighted. Identified knowledge gaps aligned with themes noted throughout the content analysis phase.

Given the context of working with human and non-human participants within an equine-assisted therapy facility, the combination of content analysis, participant observation, and fieldnotes allowed me to gather data without hindering the flow of a busy organization. Due to the complex nature of the facility, space and time priority is given to clientele who have booked therapy lessons. As a volunteer, I supported programs in tandem with learning and observing. Fieldnotes were made in-the-moment or later in the day, and content analysis of TEAD resources, plus comparators, provided a means of understanding existing volunteer training practices within the EAT industry.

Limitations

Methodological limitations include the lack of direct input from staff and volunteers through qualitative methods such as focus groups, interviews, or a survey. Time constraints prevented research with human participants; however, this type of research could be taken up in future research that extends the current work. Conversations with my supervisor and taking time to reflect on my own positionality ensured I remained self-reflexive throughout the research process.

Ethics

In this project, ethics centred on the building of respect and community with TEAD as the partner organization in this research. I conducted this work with the intention of mitigating potential harm produced through this partnership, such as stepping outside the boundaries of the project scope or sharing private information with members of the volunteer group instead of focusing on communication with my TEAD supervisor. I also engaged respectfully with members of the expert panel for the creative portion of the project. Although this research did not require REB approval, it was important to work with intentionality as a member of the TEAD community and as a member of the graduate student community of Wilfrid Laurier University. This ethical relationality required routine check-ins with my MRP and TEAD supervisors as I worked to create a project that would benefit both parties. I kept communication open and clear, and listened to the needs of TEAD as the community partner, even as staffing situations fluctuated throughout the data collection and creative project development process. The intent of this project was to create a volunteer training resource that would complement existing volunteer practices, so giving equal consideration to opportunities and limitations within the scope of the project was key. I acknowledge that my own lived experiences were central to

this research, and, through reflexivity, I remained mindful of their influence. As Levac (2018) cautions, researchers must "examine their positions within existing power relations" (p. 11).

Although my project did not involve methods that required direct human participation, I kept the core principles of TCPS 2 in mind by respecting persons that I came into contact with (TEAD staff, volunteers, MRP supervisory panel), while remaining mindful of the welfare of TEAD as the community organization. As is the focus of this project, I was also constantly mindful of the horses and their care and wellbeing. I remained attentive to the justice initiative that is the focus of this project: animal advocacy developed through an enhanced understanding of human-animal relationships, in an effort to deconstruct anthropocentric views and improve volunteer-horse interactions at TEAD.

Summary

Within this theoretical framework, there is a robust body of research that is working to deconstruct anthropocentric views of animals while paying critical attention to industry developments that cater to the needs of humans. With AAT/EAT programs on the rise, and as human actors within a network that enforces animal participation, we need to expand our knowledge on HAR and HAI, to consider the realities of animals' lived experiences. The physical and emotional needs of humans should not be driving these conversations, but, rather, we should prioritize symbiotic relationships where animal participants are equally recognized and considered. Humans have an important role to play as we adjust our thinking, alter our practices involving animals, and work to consistently include the needs of animals as equal to those of humans, acknowledging their gifts while recognizing that every interaction requires animals to concede in some way to human need. There is opportunity for mutualism, "a

symbiotic relationship in which both actors benefit from ‘living together,’” but, first, humans must set aside viewpoints that understand animals as tools for human betterment (Gorman, 2019, p. 318.).

Results

Overall, there were two main contributors to the data collection phase of this paper: the human volunteer, and the non-human therapy horse. From week-to-week and depending on the day of the week and time of day, the volunteers observed were in constant rotation. Therapy programs of this size are drastically influenced by participation decisions of volunteers, new and existing. Volunteers range in age, ability, and knowledge, while sharing the desire to provide the most effective help they can within individualized capacities. An optimal situation requires the full commitment of a volunteer group assigned to a particular lesson or group of lessons, who learn alongside each other form week-to-week within a session block (six-to-ten-week programs). This is due to the way in which volunteers familiarize themselves with client and therapy horse requirements, developing efficiencies in time and resources, optimizing experiences for all, client, trainer, volunteers, and horses. Through this achievement, trust is expressed and reciprocity cultivated between all human and non-human participants. Heightened strain is notable when scheduling or environmental changes impact the flow and efficiency of work between volunteers and horses.

The therapy horses assigned to each client and lesson differ based on the needs of the client, and the abilities and behavioural norms known about each horse. Horses are scheduled to ensure adequate resting time, maintaining the optimal experience for horses, although not always possible due to unforeseen circumstances, such as injury to a partner horse. Scheduling changes are expected while recognizing added stress to volunteers, trainers, or horses. Throughout my

observational time, I had the pleasure of working with a dozen horses that ranged in size, breed, and age, providing opportunity to consider a variety of factors that influence a session. My interactions were experienced across a range, including feeding, mucking out stalls, moving horses from one location to the next, preparing, leading, and side-walking in lessons, as well as grooming.

Observational Data

Throughout the development of the MRP process, from placement hours and fieldnotes to personal observations, one of the most notable results of the project stems from the approach individuals take in working with horses based on their own comfort level, confidence, and personal awareness. These approaches are key to discerning how well horses are treated within the EAT environment. Within an equine-assisted therapy setting, considerations include working in-sync with staff, volunteers, and lesson schedules, along with the desire to fully support human clientele who are reliant on lessons for therapeutic and enjoyment purposes. Additionally, there is complexity within the multi-species dynamic: the difference in size, communication styles, behaviours, and external factors, including weather, client behaviour, or increased facility activity such as maintenance.

Appendix D provides a sample of field notes gathered during the data collection phase. Some observations are outside the locus of control for volunteers, such as weather, maintenance activity generating unfamiliar sounds, and disrupting regular grooming and preparation routines. Other observations were in direct relation to a volunteer's response to a situation, including limited volunteer support, the creation of a calm working environment, or in providing additional reassurance to a horse due to unexpected stimuli within the lesson.

Observation 1: Individualized Approach

Throughout my observational period at TEAD, I noted that volunteers work from an individualized approach whereby they jump into action upon arrival. Some volunteers prefer to go straight to the arena and wait for lessons to begin with specific instructions from trainers, while others begin in the tack room gathering resources required for each client, while others go to stalls and pastures to retrieve horses for pre-lesson grooming and prep work. No matter where volunteers begin, it is necessary for the entire volunteer, horse, and staff team to adjust upon the arrival of each volunteer. The goal is to be ready for clientele shortly before each lesson, including adequate volunteer support, readied horses, and an instructor who has set the arena course, reviewed notes, and is prepared to meet the needs of each client. Meeting these goals for multiple lessons each day, requires a synchronized team confident in their roles who are skilled at supporting human and non-human participants adequately. When volunteers fall out of sync due to lack of experience or confidence, or lessons are impacted by external factors such as weather or facility maintenance, the horses pick up on the energy shift projected from volunteers. Each of these factors might cause a horse to respond through fear, agitation, or unwillingness to participate. As such, human actors must be attuned to the needs of horses as well as humans.

Observation 2: Volunteer Awareness

In 2022, Rudd and colleagues conducted research specific to volunteer experiences at equine-assisted therapy centres, whereby survey results indicated volunteer interest in learning more about equine health and behavior, including the ability to recognize and manage perceived negative behaviours (p. 6). Within the data collection phase of this project, it became clear that there was a gap in volunteer training whereby volunteers were receiving limited informal

training related to equine communication and behaviour. Although informal sharing of such knowledge between staff and volunteers exists and is encouraged, the information is not centrally gathered and widely shared prior to volunteers beginning their first shift, nor can we assume that every volunteer might ask appropriate questions in order to enter into this conversation. As Rudd and colleagues (2022) highlight, positive responses are created within human-horse interactions when volunteers project a positive attitude towards therapy animals. These outcomes are achievable through light equipment handling (meaning no tension when handling or tacking up horses), in providing positive reinforcement with verbal cues, or in scratching the horse's withers, an area located at the top of the shoulder near the end of the mane (Rudd et. al., 2022). Rudd and colleagues (2022) also indicate the importance of noticing volunteers' approach as these interactions "positively or negatively contribute to the success of a session, for both horses and humans" (2022, p. 2). All of these data aligned with my own observations at TEAD.

Observation 3: Volunteer Requirements

Additional field observations included careful attention to the day-to-day demands within the TEAD environment, the clear necessity for adequate volunteer support for each lesson, and the importance of post-lesson debrief opportunities to ensure improvements related to rider and therapy horse experience. Each of these observations signal the importance of organizational awareness to ensure a seamless experience for human and non-human involvement. Ultimately, these are the reasons that having dedicated and well-trained volunteers is crucial to EAT organizations like TEAD. As noted by Ellen in the creative project training video, without willing horses and dedicated volunteers, the programming would not be possible (Appendix C, Section 38).

Creating a team of dedicated volunteers is no easy task since people have countless places to focus their time and energy. In working alongside volunteers and staff who pride themselves in supporting TEAD, it was evident that staff work tirelessly to create a positive environment for volunteers to learn, to share ideas or concerns, and to participate in meaningful work. Shifts included volunteers brand new to the organization who worked alongside veterans serving as mentors. In 160 hours of observational time, I noted a plethora of opportunities ranging from leading and side-walking to barn work, winter to spring. Volunteering at an EAT facility is a personal journey, and often an emotional one due to the way volunteers become attached to particular therapy horses and clientele they've supported for years. As excitement builds around new horses adopted to the barn or in taking time to remember a long-standing member of the equine family who recently passed, this volunteer group is guided by their sense of duty for both human and non-human actors within this unique multispecies environment. For these reasons, it was clear from my observations that the next step was to extend volunteers' ability to read, respond, and care for the horses.

Content Analysis

As part of the content analysis, I reviewed three additional EAT facility websites (each facility is located within the southern Ontario region), working to identify what other facilities were providing in terms of volunteer training requirements. Similar to what was identified during the analysis of TEAD training resources, a gap was noted in comparator resources in acknowledging and providing formal training related to common horse communication and behaviour cues. Main observation themes included "nothing reviews horse interaction or behaviour", "not intentional about horse behaviour", and "nothing that addresses a relationship

built from cooperation with a horse". The need to develop a training resource that reviews common horse communication and behavioural cues, would enhance existing training practices within the industry, by extending volunteer knowledge, and elevating the well-being and relationality, between therapy horses and volunteers.

Perhaps as an outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic, and/or efforts to promote volunteer opportunities more broadly, each comparator website included links to video resources, ranging from general promotional videos and testimonials to a detailed training library of nineteen how-to videos related to daily tasks within an EAT setting. The video library confirmed that a variety of training tools are used within the industry, from in-person, to printed volunteer manuals, to virtual resources. Rudd and colleagues (2022) assert that in-person training "remains the gold standard" in training practices, while recognizing that barriers exist with this approach, including staff time and cost to host multiple training sessions a year (p. 2). EAT facilities are bustling with activity and have limited down time for hosting training sessions. Looking for alternative training methods is necessary. Providing video resources means that these trainings are easily accessible, accommodate a variety of learning styles, and are less taxing on limited staff resources. Session recordings can be organized around lesson schedules, customized to volunteer feedback, or observed need, recorded, and edited from home, and are complementary to in-person and printed resources. Virtual resources are easily shareable via email, website, and organizational YouTube accounts, can be viewed at the convenience of the volunteer, and on devices they have access to, including phones, computers, or tablets. Video resources can also be customized so that closed captioning is enabled, transcriptions are produced, and content is predetermined so that adequate detail is given for those who benefit from audio instruction. For

all these reasons, creating a video training resource became an obvious direction for the creative output of this project.

Reflections on Creative Outcome

After considering the benefits of developing a video resource, and the noted gap in formal training related to horse behaviours within TEAD training practices, it became evident that the development of a video focused on behavioural and communication cues would benefit volunteers and staff as well as horses. Enhancing volunteer knowledge helps to ensure the well-being of therapy horses, while also positively impacting experiences for human clientele. In working to fill the identified gap, the sharing of equine behavioural knowledge furthers efforts to deconstruct anthropocentric views by centering horses alongside humans within EAT settings. As volunteers learn about common horse behaviours, confidence levels increase for supporting the needs of therapy animals, who in turn are positioned to support the needs of human clientele--a viable form of reciprocity.

Appreciative inquiry provided me the opportunity to focus on "strength-based perspectives … while linking the knowledge created within the research to growing future capacities" (Cooperrider et al., 2005, p.7). As a student, volunteer, or staff member, extending my research capacity within a positive environment made sense. As my observations indicated, TEAD works diligently to provide a safe and positive learning environment as volunteers are numerous. Scheduling training with volunteers is challenging due to limited resources and time. As such, conducting research that could both grow TEAD's training capacity and focus on the improvement of horses' experiences fit perfectly with the scope of this creative MRP.

In the development of the creative project, I worked with intention to capture the

information that I observed being shared, looking closely to see what could be improved upon within existing print and in-person training practices. It was important to me to produce a resource that would ease the strain of training demand, while filling the informational gaps I observed from watching volunteers at work. It was also key to create a resource that encouraged variety within training practices that could also meet accessibility needs and cater to diverse learning styles. Not only are volunteers able to revisit this resource from the device of their choosing, but they are also able to watch, listen, or read it, based on their personal preferences. In addition, the video can be used as a template for future training videos due to its flexibility around staff schedules, programming, and the identification of new training needs. Further reflection on the creative project is incorporated in the discussion section below. The training video can be accessed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T82XSXKidek

Discussion

The central takeaway from months of observation, experiences, and content analysis, is that EAT facilities have the ability to necessitate deep collaboration and mutual respect between human and non-human actors, when the well-being and contributions from all participants are considered equal. The research within this paper would benefit from observational and data expansion to include additional EAT facilities, in order to compare training resources and practices, and in providing an enhanced understanding of industry standards, versus a single facility sampling. I am not suggesting that all equine therapy facilities work from standardized policies, or intention that address anthropocentric views. What I was able to identify through a partnership with TEAD Therapeutic Riding Centre, is that there is need to formalize volunteer training practices that intentionally deconstruct anthropocentric views. This can be achieved

through the formal development of training resources that inform volunteers about human influence on the well-being of therapy animals, while providing insight into horse communication and behavioural cues, reflective of a cooperative approach versus hierarchical. As Finkelstein (2022) says of their EAT ethnography research:

> [M]any boundaries blur together, given that all of us - including horses and humans - are workers, teachers, and students on the farm. Communication is expansive and includes all the available senses. Interspecies collaboration cultivates flexibility, creativity, and openness. I am surrounded by teachers, and I am constantly learning (p. 631).

Finkelstein works with intention to identify the important contributions made by all actors and species within an EAT setting. In doing so, Finkelstein exemplifies how humans can change the narrative to decentre themselves and to reshape human-animal relationships of all kinds. In developing a training resource with the purpose of informing EAT volunteers about equine behavioural and communication cues, the conversation between volunteer and horse is redirected from a human monologue to an interspecies dialogue that encourages the openness to which Finkelstein strives. This is achieved when the volunteer is aware of how their actions, verbal and physical, influence the well-being of therapy horses, for example, moving within shared spaces while grooming and tacking up, involving the application of weight and pressure while humans interject themselves within the animals' personal space. In this way, my MRP work sets the stage for volunteers to learn from and about their equine colleagues, while considering how their actions directly impact the lived experiences of therapy partners.

Through my observations, I was able to confirm through field notes (Appendix D), that informal well-being practices do occur on a consistent basis, for example, through trainer

confirmation of proper use and fit of tack, correcting pressure applied from the volunteer through the lead rope, or in providing additional support when it's noted that a horse is having an anxious or fearful response to a new stimuli. These examples support a willingness amongst TEAD staff in prioritize the well-being of the horses, while further effort is required to formalize such positive relationality between volunteers and therapy animals.

Creating Volunteer Connections with Horses

Worth noting are some of the reasons why humans volunteer with animals in the first place. Abell (2012) explains that humans look for "similarities between humans and nonhuman animals" guiding our "moral duty to care for them" and refers to this behaviour as a type of anthropomorphism (p 160). From this observation, we can recognize that EAT volunteers may acquire a sense of duty to care for horses through anthropocentric practices, namely, the application of human qualities to equine partners. Somewhat ironically then, the processes through which we recognize biases within human-animal relationships: training, learning and reflexivity, can guide us away from harmful anthropocentric behaviours, while other anthropocentric practices can stimulate a desire to understand equine communication and behavioural cues.

In identifying these positive and negative uses of anthropomorphism, we can learn to deconstruct dominant norms that are overly human-centred, while also working with, and learning from, animals in ways that connect our actions to theirs. I am not suggesting that we apply human qualities and language to horse interactions (thereby continuing to centre ourselves) in order to feel connected or morally obligated to their care, but rather, that humans can work with their own inclinations and curiosities to gain the skills to interpret equine behaviour, and,

therefore, to experience a deeper understanding of the equine species.

Likewise, Abell (2012) also highlights the importance of "skin-to-skin contact" to evoke compassion "for another agent, human or otherwise" (p. 161). It has been long understood that the act of grooming is an important step in building a relationship of trust with horses. TEAD, and other EAT facilities, recognize how important this step is and develop volunteer training practices that include proper grooming techniques. The development of this new resource focused on common communication and behavioural cues, then, provides opportunity to extend these feelings of compassion, which fit well within existing training practices. In a sense, grooming enhances humans' ability to encourage connectedness with animals while also enhancing animals' ability to connect with us. These discussions are all central to working with EAT volunteers.

Developing Commensal Relationships

In their research with animals, Jensen and colleagues (1993) discuss the ways in which their motivational states derive from the nervous system. They describe the motivational state as "the likelihood that an animal will engage in a certain behaviour, or the strength of its tendency in competing for expression" (p. 164). Here, they identify the importance of animals being able to "engage in species-specific behaviour" in order to avoid undue stress (p. 176-177). Within an EAT setting, where horses are trained to behave, support, and respond in a fashion that centres human need, there is a certain percentage of time where species-specific behaviours are limited. For example, in response to a sound or movement that startles the horse, horses are trained to supress their natural responses. As highly intuitive prey animals that mirror the actions and

feelings of the humans they are in contact with, this response suppression has the potential to cause suffering. When EAT practices at TEAD become intentional through training volunteers in behavioural and communication cues and in how to respond to horses' needs accordingly, this knowledge can buffer and limit exposure to the suffering of therapy animals.

Likewise, in their thesis, Ammerman (2017) describes human-animal interactions as "construct niches," a term that encompasses the physical, behavioural, and cultural changes enacted through human-animal interactions when considering the "evolutionary trajectory" that humans and animals have within a shared environment (p.4). Ammerman suggests that equal consideration should be given to how animals allow or alter interaction with humans, rather than only thinking about humans' interventions with animals. Horses often humble volunteers due to their size, strength, and willingness to participate, impacting the shared space that is the EAT facility, which is, in this case, the construct niche under study. These are examples of how the horses assert their influence over the EAT environment.

Ammerman (2017) defines a domestic animal as "one that lives in a mutualistic relationship with humans … [and] is under the control of humans" (p. 11). They further explain that many domesticated animals will stay in close contact with humans with regular interaction, potentially from the time of birth. Commensal domesticated human-animal relationships are driven by human desire to enhance the relationship. However, Ammerman (2017) suggests that domesticated animals have a natural tendency to socialize with humans, but that humans hold the privilege in deciding when and to what degree these interactions occur. For example, there exists a wide range of activity that requires equine participation: entertainment, racing, gambling, breeding, training, and therapy work, to name a few. To this end, in commensal relationships with horses it is easy to see the clear benefit for human participants, but steps must be taken to

limit animals' exposure to harm. Reflecting on this construction of commensal domesticated animal relationships and my time at TEAD, it is clear that horses are required in order to provide programming, but equal emphasis is also placed on limiting physical or psychological harm to the horses. In formalizing volunteer training on communication and behavioural cues, each volunteer has the opportunity to understand the extent to which they participate in creating positive and supportive interactions with therapy horses on a daily basis. In a sense, volunteers have the privilege of enhancing their own experiences as well as the experiences of therapy horses within HAI. Striving to ensure commensal relationships requires volunteers to connect and be intentional with the horses in their care—only then can we begin to work toward relationships of mutualism.

Moving to Mutualism

A common human-centred assumption suggests that nonhumans are "passive intermediaries" within an EAT network. As noted by Murdoch (1997) in their research guided by ANT, network creation and translation are key to doing this work in more socially just ways: "These translations involve a complex series of negotiations within the networks whereby identities are fought over, roles are ascribed, and power relations fixed" (p. 740). Murdoch describes ANT as a "relationalist theory" between actors within a network. If we apply Murdoch's theory to EAT, and more specifically, to my observations of TEAD, we can see the ways in which TEAD is a social-network entity which encompasses human and non-human actors. As such, EAT should be approached in relational ways with the goal of achieving the best results for all actors. Transforming power relations within the network means that horses must also be considered agentic in therapeutic processes and be cared for accordingly. The more volunteers know about horse behaviour and communication cues, the more human-animal

interactions can improve and support all actors in the EAT network. Murdoch (1997) references the work of Latour and Foucault when describing how ANT is essentially a power struggle amongst actors within a network, and at any point, actors can respond with or against the network for a variety of reasons. It is important to remember that horses, too, assert their power and resistance when the network is oppressive. Paying attention to their cues and behaviours allows volunteers to notice when horses are enacting their resistance. Power sharing requires this attentiveness which can set the pace for ethical and mutually beneficial human-animal relationships.

Suggestions for Future Research

Outside the scope of this work, but important to note, is the need to consider research on the harm inducing factors within horse-involved industries. Injuries to horses require assistance from external service providers, such as equine massage therapists, chiropractors, farriers, and veterinarians. Involvement in these industries and the acquired injuries that horses suffer impact the trajectory of horses' well-being. Competitive sport and recreational industries put horses at heightened risk of injuries early in their lives, with the potential for long-term implications. Also worth noting is potential psychological damage due to injury, aggressive training programs, abuse, or souring when participating in a physically taxing activity for longer than horses desire. Reflecting on Jensen and colleagues' (1993) motivational state research, the extent that a horse engages with a certain activity should consider a horse's perceived social motivation and physical well-being. This prioritization of horses' well-being conflicts with capitalist driven business models and would be met with animosity from some industry partners who thrive on

exploiting the physical capacities of horses. These actors prefer to promote an anthropocentric view where human need and desires are centred within the human-animal relationship.

Conclusion

There are equine-related industries working with the intention to create environments of reciprocity between human and non-human participants. My experiences at TEAD provided me the ability to learn from and appreciate their goal of sharing the gift of time with horses with the public. They do so while ensuring policies and practices are in place that consider the well-being of therapy horses. This can be a tricky balance when priorities shift to the safety of human clientele, but staff continue to keep an eye on behavioural cues to ensure horses are comfortably engaged during their work time. The barn manager remains mindful of health indicators as they supervise the ongoing care of the equine team. Trainers are diligent with ensuring tack is well placed and comfortable, and that volunteers are mindful of their actions that impact equine partners. It is through my observations of this attention to commensal relationships, that I chose to create a digital resource that would explain equine behavioural and communication cues. This creative outcome could then become a centralized resource that is easily shared throughout the training process.

Throughout this work, ANT provided the lens to view TEAD as a network. Through ANT, I was able to identify that human and non-human actors contribute equally and to move beyond views of non-human actors as “passive intermediaries” (Murdoch, 1997, p. 740). Ultimately, the goal of this research is to consider the well-being of all actors and, in doing so, to break down the hierarchical views that dominate most industries thriving on animal participation. A social justice perspective works against dominant colonial and/or Eurocentric viewpoints, while providing a space for non-human partners, or actors, to be considered active participants with their own lived

experiences. As articulated by Ammerman (2017), genuine commensal relationships require human desire to progress beyond their own needs and ends. Therefore, humans looking to improve the quality of life for non-human colleagues, such as those volunteering at TEAD, must be well equipped to challenge dominant narratives that prioritize human need.

Lorenzetti (2013) effectively articulates social justice research and advocacy work as:

> the discovery of a new set of lenses, emerging tools, and new pathways while maintaining a critical perspective roots in anti-oppressive praxis. Research becomes an extension of one's own identity as a human rights activist, which requires leveraging the skills and capacities of research as a strategy to move to a more socially just world (p. 451).

I situate my work within this paradigm as I use my own identities and experiences to create research that leads to anti-oppressive praxis in the care and consideration of horses. Anthropocentrism often encourages non-community and non-network perspectives that lack the desire to change colonial and/or Western utilitarian models which encourage human power at the expense of treatment disparities between humans and non-humans. Recognizing that animals are forced to centre human needs and desires creates urgency for this type of animal advocacy work. As suggested by numerous researchers advocating for change, reciprocity becomes key to this conversation. Truly commensal human-animal relationships must consider partnership over hierarchy (Snowshoe 2015, Finkelstein 2022, Kimmerer 2015, Gorman 2019). Change can happen at the community and network levels through training and care policies that adopt language, both verbal and non-verbal, that considers the needs, behaviours, and communication styles of non-human partners. Many non-Western perspectives reject hierarchical views, and

therefore, we know it is possible to create the necessary change. These views, especially as espoused by many Indigenous communities, respect human-animal relationships through understandings of reciprocity and mutualism. Therein lies the challenge for social justice work that seeks to undo colonial understandings of human-animal relationships, especially within a Western utilitarian dominated world.

The intention of this research paper and creative project was to question to what degree equine-assisted therapy facilities consider the needs of non-human participants while developing policies and practices that deconstruct anthropocentric views. Throughout my observations, TEAD staff and volunteers showcased that equine-assisted therapy facilities built from a foundation of reciprocity exist. Though we are not at the point of mutualism, where each partner is experiencing equal benefit, we can enhance and sustain commensal relationships where reciprocity is exemplified through the desire to progress human-animal relationships and to focus on horses lived experiences as they engage in this work that so benefits humans.

To conclude, I offer this quote from Argent (2013) that captures the essence of the human-horse relationship and provides a map to reciprocity while working on commensal or even mutualistic relationships with horses:

> Horses share social characteristics and needs with humans, use similar nonverbal communication modalities to meet these needs, and can choose members of other species as friends. Because of this, they are able to come together with humans through a co-created and understood embodied language, potent in its ability to create relational meaning, and compelling in affective force (p. 115 – 116).

Social justice animal advocacy work remains crucial. As individuals and as researchers, we are able to encourage these conversations within the networks and communities in which we live and work. Through the sharing of new knowledge, we can provide perspective that many people have yet to consider.

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Appendix

Appendix A

TEAD - Five Equine Behavioural and Communication Cues - Volunteer Training Video

Training Video YouTube Link

Appendix B

Video Description

This 30-minute video reviews five common physical locations on a horse that are used to communicate how horses are feeling or responding to a situation, ears, eyes, mouth, legs, and tail. Ellen, TEAD. Instructor, Deb, TEAD. Barn Manager, and Rachel, TEAD. Volunteer, review how and why they monitor these locations, and how these observations can adjust the way in which we as humans, interact with horses. Understanding behavioural and communication cues is important to supporting and creating a positive environment within human-animal interactions, where humans and animals are considered equally. This video has been created for volunteer training purposes, in an effort to share knowledge that can enhance a volunteer's awareness and confidence when working with therapy horses.

Total length: 33:37

Appendix C

Video Transcript

1. Rachel - Volunteer (00:02)
   Hello everyone. Thank you for joining us for this information session. My name is Rachel and I'm a volunteer at TEAD. Equestrian Association for the Disabled. If you're watching this training video, you may also be a current existing volunteer or a new volunteer that has joined the team. We want to thank you for your time and supporting programming and for contributing to the care and well-being of the therapy horses. Joining me today are two panel experts, Deb, and Ellen. Deb, go ahead and introduce yourself.

2. Deb - Barn Manager (00:37)
   Hello, I'm Deb and I'm currently the barn manager. Just started the role Monday to Friday just a couple of months ago but have been working with the organization for over ten years now and love every minute of it. Wonderful, enjoy.

3. Rachel - Volunteer (00:53)
   Fantastic Deb. And to you, Ellen. Can you introduce yourself?

4. Ellen - Instructor (00:58)
   Hello everybody. My name is Ellen and I'm an instructor at TEAD. I've been at TEAD. For five years now and I've actually been in many roles at TEAD and I landed on my favorite one. So, I'm really happy to be there and I'm happy to be part of this discussion, so thank you.

5. Rachel - Volunteer (01:19)
   Wonderful. And thank you to you both for joining me tonight. So, our goal with this short session is to share knowledge on common horse communication behaviors. Because horses obviously don't communicate the same way as humans, we want to contribute to volunteer awareness on how to interpret common equine behavior cues. As volunteers, the impact, the important work we do as the first point of contact, often the first point of contact with therapy horses pre lessons, throughout lessons, and even post lessons. Our actions are really important with the well-being of the horses while also setting the tone for the lessons and for the clients. So today we want to focus on the more obvious physical cues that horses will give us, such as placement of ears, their eyes, their mouth, their legs, and tail. When grooming and tacking up horses, volunteers are able to observe behaviors from all of these location points. Given the size of these animals, we may observe movements in these locations and wonder what they're trying to tell us or if there's something that they need. Deb and Ellen are going to share their extensive insights across years of experience with us. So, we're going to begin with the ears, often perceived as radars or beacons when it comes to what horses are thinking. Forward and alert, relaxed, listening, and even pinned, the ears communicate a lot to us. So, Deb, why don't we start with you? When you're working with a horse, what are you observing about the placement and movement of the ears?

6. Deb - Barn Manager (03:12)
   So ideally, their ears would be forward facing. They're paying attention to what's going on. You may see them moving their ears around because they're picking up on different sounds around them so they could be listening behind them. So, I am mindful of when their ears are moving around because if they're hearing something that they're not quite sure what it is, they may move forward. To get away from whatever that might be. So, they're prey animals, so they want to move away from any perceived danger. So just paying attention to where their ears are listening to so that you're giving them the confidence to get through whatever situation they think they're having. Their ears also are a barometer for temperature. So, if you feel their ear and it is cold, that means the horse is cold as well. So, you'd have to take measures there to warm up that horse. But, yeah, their ears are definitely always moving, it seems. So just paying attention to what they're trying to listen to. They're trying to tell you that they've heard something, something's on their radar, and just give them the confidence to move through that situation.

7. Rachel - Volunteer (04:27)
   Wonderful, okay, thank you for that. Ellen, as an instructor, how do you observe situations through the movements of the horse's ears?

8. Ellen - Instructor (04:37)
   Well, much like Deb said, because you have to be so aware of the horse's health and how they're feeling. I'm also observing the horse going in all different directions because they

have so many people, they need to pay attention to. They need to pay attention to me. They need to pay attention to their rider. They need to pay attention to their leader and potentially pay attention to their side walkers. So, all of that is going on as well as outward things that they need to pay attention to. Like Deb said, they're prey animals and they need to keep themselves alive. So, not saying they're in any danger, but they might feel that way. Like Deb said, forward facing ears are very positive in kind of like a relaxed manner. They're more off to the side to be more relaxed, kinda think about yourself, if there's tension in anything you do, then there's feeling behind that. It is similar with horses. You do have to get an eye for it. The ears are a great signal to look at because they're just so expressive. Often people think that ears back is a bad thing. It could mean that they are listening to you, but if they are back with tension pinned to their head, they are not happy. There's just ways that you can explain that to somebody that if there's tension behind it or it's quick, those are things that horses don't appreciate. So, over time, you, with guidance, will come to realize that different movements are not necessarily bad, but we need to pay attention to them, just like with verbal communication with people.

9. Rachel - Volunteer (06:21)
   Absolutely. Those are all excellent points. One of the questions that I was going to ask based on what you're sharing is that sometimes we might respond and feel a little nervous because perhaps we're seeing a lot of movement in the ears. And if you are a volunteer that's helping to prep a horse before a lesson, if we think about having the horse connected in the cross tie and how much we move around their body and in front of their heads and back to the other side, that does influence a lot of natural movement as they listen to our actions or perhaps the brushes that we're using or their hoof pick and they're observing what we're doing. As a volunteer within this space, ears are a really good indicator that they're alert and paying attention. But we don't necessarily have to be nervous because those ears are moving around. It's just a natural way for them to be connected with what's happening in their environment. Does that sound fair?

10. Deb - Barn Manager (07:33)
    Absolutely

11. Rachel - Volunteer (07:34)
    Okay. Next to that, I wanted to talk a little bit about the eyes. Because they are an active location for portraying how a horse is feeling or how they may be responding to a situation. By watching the eyes, we become informed as to how the horse is feeling about a situation, but also, we can respond accordingly. I think eyes are an area that sometimes people don't realize how much they can learn from paying attention to the alertness or the softness or the movement of the eye. I would love to hear from both of you. Deb, again, can you provide your perspective on what the eyes are telling you as somebody that is connected to their care in the barn?

12. Deb - Barn Manager (08:25)
    So as you mentioned, Rachel, the soft eye is what you're looking for, and that means everything's great with that horse. Any tension around the eye, there is something that we need to pay attention to. So, there's something going on with the horse that they're upset

about, so we need to figure out what that is or pay just a little bit more attention to what's going on there. If you see the whites in their eyes, then that's a little bit of a cautionary sign to make sure that you're standing back and taking your time with the horse to figure out what's going on. For me, because I'm the barn manager, I'm also looking for things like if there's some discharge or something that's around their eye that could go in their eye, just making sure that we're keeping the health of the eye good as well. Just looking for a soft eye, that's what I'm looking for.

13. Rachel - Volunteer (09:26)
    Absolutely. Obviously, the eyes can be changed from session to session, from day to day. It's really just something that allows us to fully understand how the horse may be feeling right in that moment, even a connection to what could have been happening to them perhaps when they were in the pasture. And as they were being led in, it really is connected to so much of what they're doing and experiencing. Ellen, from an instructor perspective, I can only imagine how important watching their eye movement is, what they're noticing, and how they're responding to it in those more engaged environments of lessons. What would you like to add to that?

14. Ellen - Instructor (10:14)
    So not only the movement and the harshness or the softness of the eye, but your placement around the horse's eyes. So, with that being said, horses eyes are on the side of their head, our eyes are on the front of our head. So, we see things a little bit differently, right? So, when you're leading a horse, if you get in front of their eye, then you're essentially taking away that horse's vision. So, in lessons coming from my perspective, it's very important that you don't step in front of the eye because people think that horses are maybe getting angry with them. Not that they're getting angry with them at all. It's just that they are taking away their ability to see. So being aware of your position around the horse's eye, not getting getting too close to the horse's eye, just like somebody wouldn't appreciate you coming up and touching their eyes. And also, my tack, I have to be very aware that my tack is not interfering with them in their vision. And like Deb said, if you see the whites of the horse's eyes, you have to be very aware of how they're feeling, what they're reacting to. And often if you follow their vision, you can see what they're either afraid or concerned about. So, you have to take in mind of the rider and the safety of all the volunteers and yourself and the horse. So if their eyes are frightened, you need to take measures to make them either feel less frightened or to get them out of the situation.

15. Rachel - Volunteer (11:45)
    I think as volunteers, whether it's our own observation or an observation being shared by you throughout a lesson or with you, Deb, when we're moving them throughout the barn spaces, it allows us to adjust how we are handling them in that moment. So, if a horse is feeling a little anxious or a little fearful about something because they've spotted or heard something, it allows us to maybe slow our pace or slow our own breathing or even speak to them. I know, Ellen, you said that quite a few times in the lessons, just speaking to them and reassuring them with our own calm voice can be really helpful in terms of being a volunteer. The other thing that I think can be a common misunderstanding about sight is horses are so beautiful when we're working with them and when we're tackling them up and especially

when they're in those cross ties. It's natural for us to reach out with the hand towards the front of their face and in this area, it's likely quite interesting for people who are new to working with horses that even though they have those big beautiful eyes, that space right here is a spot where they actually don't see our movement. So it's likely good for us to be aware of that again when we're leading them, but also when we're tacking them and brushing them to be mindful of that space and perhaps limit that urge to reach out and pet them in that soft spot between their eyes all the time.

16. Deb - Barn Manager (13:25)
    Good point.

17. Rachel - Volunteer (13:28)
    Okay, so here's the interesting one. This is one that I think a lot of people have questions about that perhaps, again, have not had a whole lot of time to engage with horses, the mouth. The mouth is an interesting area. It can do lots of moving. It can tell us, again, how they're feeling or how they're responding to what we're doing with them when we're tacking, when we're grooming, when we're leading the horse. Excuse me, we're aware of the mouth, especially when we're working with a horse that might be a bit mouthy or even a bit nippy. So, I thought maybe we'd take a couple of minutes to discuss that important area of the horse and what it's trying to communicate. Ellen, why don't we start with you on this one?

18. Ellen - Instructor (14:19)
    Excellent. So, with horses, there's always warnings before horses react to anything, right? So, with them being mouthy at TEAD., we try to discourage that by no hand feeding. We only feed our horses out of bowls. So that eliminates that urge for them to connect that way, which is really positive in my opinion. Not that they don't get treats, they just get them out of bowls. And on the other half of that, horses don't have a way of telling people to stop. They have ways of showing you by backing away or getting uncomfortable, but they don't have ways of saying, stop, I don't like that, or stop, that hurts. So sometimes that comes out in a way that they would communicate with their herd through their mouth. So, if people are doing things that are uncomfortable to them or that they don't appreciate and then they have no other way of expressing themselves, sometimes that's their only way of doing so. So not necessarily that we would ever want that to happen or that it's okay for that to happen, but it's the way that they express themselves naturally. So, to combat that, you just have to make sure that you're going at the pace that's comfortable with the horse. Questions are great. Always ask your instructor if that's the way that you need to go about things, the way that you need to learn because you're always going to be learning around horses and they can help you do that without having to show those teeth.

19. Rachel - Volunteer (16:08)
    Yeah, absolutely. So many great points there. Deb, do you have some perspective as to what you're watching for when they're communicating with their mouths, other than just being hungry. Yeah, for sure. What else might they be telling us?

20. Deb - Barn Manager (16:22)
    So sometimes we'll be getting a horse from a stall to take them to the grooming area and their

heads just resting on the stall door and the bottom lip is just hanging down. So that's a very relaxed mouth and they might even be semi sleeping. So, in that case, you wouldn't want to just approach the horse without maybe calling a name or letting them know that you're coming into their space so that you don't startle them. There's that. I mean, if they're chewing, then they're in a relaxed mood as well. That's a very positive sign. Then again, it's just no tension. Tension is everywhere in their face, so you're always looking for no tension there as well.

21. Rachel - Volunteer (17:07)
    Yeah, absolutely. That's such a valuable thing for volunteers to keep in mind is where they might be holding the tension, whether again it's in their ears, their eyes, or their mouth. What about yawning? When a horse is yarning, because as a volunteer, if you're doing that nice brushing again in the cross ties before you start to tack them up, sometimes that can be an experience, or oftentimes that's an experience that a horse really, really enjoys. You might see them doing some yawning. What does yawning mean when a horse is doing that?

22. Ellen - Instructor (17:45)
    In my experience, yawning is a release. It's not a verbal thank you, but it is something that you can take at value as a thank you because it's a release that feels good. Tension is leaving their body. Just much as like ourselves, we do that yawn and it's that release endorphin feeling. Afterwards, they get the same thing.

23. Rachel - Volunteer (18:14)
    Wonderful. Okay, thank you so much. All right. So, let's move on to the legs. They have four of them. They're big, they're fast, they're heavy, they can move suddenly. And so, this is certainly an area that that can take volunteers time to get comfortable with working with. When it comes to being mindful of the legs, we may be considering how they're positioned, how they’re moving, whether they're not moving, perhaps if one leg is a little cocked in a relaxed position, or if they're moving a leg a lot. I think that this can be a really interesting area to discuss and just give a little bit of insight to. Ellen, again, why don't we start with you? When it comes to the legs, the hooves, that whole area, what are some things you're looking for?

24. Ellen - Instructor (19:12)
    Definitely, again, with the placement of somebody's body. With horses, it's very important that you place yourself parallel to something that you're picking up. You don't want to be underneath them. You don't want to be too far from them. With that being said, it's also important that you don't restrict their movement or make things more comfortable for you. What I mean by that is not lifting their hooves to a level that might be a little more comfortable for you but makes them very uncomfortable. In that case, we can set them off balance. We can limit their movement when they need to make a readjustment, and then it comes across as maybe the horse might be misbehaving when, in fact, the horse has just lost their balance. So, we have to be mindful of that because we are taking away one of their four legs. So, to have four legs and then have three legs, that's a lot, right. So, we have to be mindful of that. We also have to be mindful that a lot of different people are working with them. So not everybody handles their legs the same way. We do a lot of volunteer training,

and we really try to enforce really safe practices, but there are some people that do it slightly differently, so we need to keep that in mind. Also, we need to make sure that our horse's legs are in good health. With that being said, if people notice anything like any cuts or scrapes, it's always been said to notify the instructor or the barn manager, whoever is closest. The barn manager should always know about it because the health of the horses is primarily the barn manager's concern, but also ours as well. So, if we notice anything, we need to make sure that we're in constant communication and the horses will tell us by either moving the leg away or not making it accessible to us if it is painful. So, we need to keep in mind that this may not be behavior, but it might be a pain response that we need to make sure that we don't make that horse then perform its therapies.

25. Rachel - Volunteer (21:29)
    Wonderful. I really appreciate the perspective that you're giving there. A lot of what we're discussing within this session is trying to deconstruct this idea that when a horse moves or has a response to something that we're doing that it is always in a negative or dangerous intention when quite often, again, because they don't communicate in the same way we do as humans, it's their way of saying that makes me uncomfortable or that hurts, or something about this situation is making me nervous and I need some reassurance. I really appreciate that you've taken the time to explain that to us as volunteers so that we understand that as we move around them and help to handle them within the lessons, that these are things that we can be mindful of, our motions and movements, and how it does impact the horses directly. Deb, I can only imagine that there are a number of reasons as to why paying attention to the legs on every therapy horse within the TEAD. Barn is an important part of your job. Can you tell us a little bit more about what you're keeping an eye on?

26. Deb - Barn Manager (22:48)
    Yeah. Even watching a horse in a stall, if they're shifting their weight back and forth between their legs and they're doing it fairly rapidly, it could be a signal that they're trying to take some weight off of one of their legs because there's an issue there. That's something to keep an eye on. You can actually watch them in their stall and gain a really good perspective of how they're feeling. Again, you mentioned the hoof cock there. That's a very neutral position. They're comfortable. But if you see a lot of shifting going around or they're splaying their front feet, you know that they're trying to take pressure off of something. Sometimes you'll see them just lay down just to try and get some pressure off of. That's something that I definitely, if you've seen it, that I would want to know about so that we can keep an eye on what's going on with them.

27. Rachel - Volunteer (23:40)
    Wonderful. The wellbeing of the horses is definitely a team effort for everybody that's involved and walks through the barn doors each and every day. It might be something that I noticed as a volunteer, Ellen notices as an instructor, or you notice. It's also many opportunities for us to perhaps not notice things because we are busy and focused on the task at hand. Having all those extra set of eyeballs to keep an eye on how the therapy horses are doing is a really important part of the work going on at TEAD. Finally, out of the five common areas that we were going to discuss during this session, we have the tail. Observing the tail can tell us many things about how a horse is feeling, much like everything else that

we've discussed, including relaxed or frustrated, or perhaps just trying to get rid of a pesky fly. Ellen, so within a lesson, movement of a tail or non-movement of a tail, please tell us more. What are you looking for when it comes to how they're utilizing their tail?

28. Ellen - Instructor (24:56)
    So a lot of communication can actually be through the tail, which people don't realize. They think they might just be swatting out flies or swishing their hair. But at the same time, the tail actually communicates a lot of things. Like Deb said with the feet, anything rapid with horses is not normal nor comfortable. Rapid tail swishing could be a sign of them being uncomfortable or them being agitated with something going on at that moment. They may not show it through their ears or their face, but their tail is just showing agitation by going really rapidly. Another thing that I really need to pay attention to is placement of tail. Because if a horse is cocking its tail to either side for a prolonged period of time, then that horse might be having an issue with that. Then I would need to let Deb know so she can assess the situation and make sure they're okay to continue on with her therapies. Another thing that you can notice from the tail is the position of it being raised. When horses are excited, their tails tend to raise and might even fold over their back. If a horse is at that level of excitement, it may not be a super safe situation for them to be mounted at that period. You need to take that into account. You need to know your horse and their excitement level and how that presents because there are ways that you can get out horses energy other than being on top of them, where it is the most safe for you to do that and so they can continue on with their job.

29. Rachel - Volunteer (26:45)
    With the movement of the tail, it might be really good to clarify that horses can move it up and down and be swishing up and down, but they can also move it quite a bit side to side. If we see movement, rapid movement of any type, that's something where we're needing to pay more attention, correct?

30. Ellen - Instructor (27:09)
    Yes, definitely.

31. Rachel - Volunteer (27:11)
    Perfect. Okay. So, Deb, finally you. What thoughts do you have about why it's important to observe the tail location and movement.

32. Deb - Barn Manager (27:22)
    And for me, if I'm seeing them out in the field and there's some tail swishing going on, that would indicate to me, and you mentioned the flies bothering them, so that would be an opportunity to come out and deal with the fly issue, whether it be a fly mask or fly spray to try and make them more comfortable. Sometimes they'll do it in their stall, but mostly it's outside. Or even if I'm working on a health issue at the back of the horse and they're clamping their tail down really tight, they're fearful at that point. They don't want me in that area. I just have to be careful where my position is in relation to where they are. They just don't want me there. That can happen as well. But normally yeah, normally it's just a little

swish and I'm out of their way.

33. Rachel - Volunteer (28:20)
    What I was going to add to that is I think, again, as humans, and if we haven't had much time working around horses, the back end looks really big and powerful, rounded, lots of muscle and fast moving back legs. What I'm hearing from both of you is that we don't necessarily need to be nervous of the hind quarters of a horse. It's not like a negative section on their body, but really, it's just about being observant and being respectful of what we're doing within that space. Is that a good general rule of thumb when it comes to working towards the back end. So as volunteers, we might be brushing towards the back end. We might be lifting up their hooves to clean them, perhaps in the cooler weather when we're putting those big blankets on and you're cinching up all the various areas. But I guess what I would say from a volunteer perspective, we don't necessarily need to be afraid of the hind corners, but just being very respectful and mindful of their space and that they can move quickly. So, if they have a response to something happening around them, that they're going to move those legs and we just need to be looking for those situations as best we can. Does that seem like a good gathering of that information?

34. Deb - Barn Manager (29:52)
    Yes

35. Rachel - Volunteer (29:54)
    Perfect. Okay. So that really does cover all the areas that we wanted to talk about for this session. But how I wanted to end is I just wanted to give you both one opportunity to provide a tip that perhaps you feel is really important for volunteers to know when joining us at TEAD. volunteering for different situations. So, Deb, as a barn manager and somebody that is often right there and observing lots of the interactions between the volunteers and the horses, what would be your number one tip that you feel is important for all volunteers to know?

36. Deb - Barn Manager (30:37)
    I would say that they are fully supported. We have the resources around to help you with absolutely everything. We don't want you to be fearful, but they are a big animal, so we need to be respectful of their size. We just need to pay... It's like when you pass somebody on the street, and they smile at you. They've said nothing to you. There is no verbal, but it was just a communication that they had with you, and it made you feel a certain way. They are communicating to us all the time. It's just that we need to be... As you work more and more with them, you'll pick up on more cues. But the nonverbal cues are very important, and you will be.

37. Rachel - Volunteer (31:23)
    Thank you for that. I definitely experienced that myself as a volunteer in the barn. Thank you, Deb. Ellen, for you, from the perspective of an instructor, what is the number one tip that you like all of your volunteers to know about the important work that they're doing in support of your instruction and in support of the animals?

38. Ellen - Instructor (31:47)
    As much as horses love their job, horses do what they do for our program, for our riders, and for us. We need to treat them with the greatest respect because their goal is to to survive and be happy. They do this for us and for our riders because they want to make us happy and they really do enjoy, in my opinion, what they are doing and what they can do for other people. Just be mindful that they are there for us and we need to support them in that in the way that they are. If you don't know, like Deb said, we are very supportive and we will always answer any question. Any question you have, please ask anybody of the TEAD. staff, whether it be an instructor, the barn manager, or even our program manager just please reach out and ask. We would appreciate you. Without you, there wouldn't be a program. Without you and the horses, we have the greatest respect.

39. Rachel - Volunteer (32:57)
    Thank you for that. I want to thank both you and Deb and Ellen for taking time out of your schedules to join me in recording this session. The goal was sharing extensive knowledge that you both have about those common, often misunderstood behaviors and responses that horses can have. I think we've definitely covered a lot of that information today. We hope this session has been informative while increasing awareness related to the unique communication between horse and human dynamics. Thank you for joining us.

Appendix D

Field Note Samples

March 29, 2023

- Disorganized
- Tack room changes
- Volunteers not sure what's happening
- Volunteers aren't scheduled for full session, fill-in
- Got behind
- Not sure where to jump in
- Not enough barn help
- All took pictures of board
- Need to know what help needed per client/horse
- Some volunteers come in and go straight to arena, don't help tack up
- First day trainer there to clarify on tack and answer questions?
- I observed confusion in tack and organization which put us behind
- Appreciative inquiry observation
    - Willingness
    - Want to get it right
    - Care from trainer with animals
    - Volunteers speak kindly to each other, and bring treats (banana bread)
- Trainer back in at end of lesson for dismount – how do we know when we're needed for this help

- Arrival time?
- Who schedule when, volunteers just show up?

April 4, 2023

- Weather – thunder, impacting grooming time, creating anxiousness in the horses, need to pivot with clients
- Anxiousness over what to do, not having enough help
- Opportunity to help other team (barn volunteers)
- Notes on board not sure what to do i.e. strap lengths for stirrups etc.

April 26, 2023

- Trainer likes to debrief after lessons
- Quieter tack area creates nicer experience for horses, I worked with Oliver (horse) - a bit anxious
- Volunteers understanding of herd mentality i.e. picking up feet – if they (horses) think they'll get away with it, they'll try
- What do horses see and hear? Oliver (horse) – focused on a riders family member who was standing at gate instead of sitting, this made him nervous
- So much care from staff/trainers for horses – trainer mentioned releasing tension on lead line when Bobby (horse) behaves – excellent point – he was "fighting" me.

May 10, 2023

- Great weather
- Electrician on sight, new noises and lights off
- Noise of volunteer cutting the grass
- Client upset, noisy during lesson
- Willie (horse) used back to back with different saddle, other volunteer wanting to massage between lessons, stretch, but no time
- Different saddle pad for Bobby (horse) noted on board. We weren't sure which one, was it with Lexie's (horse) tack?
- Riders rode inside and outside today, new experience, new sounds etc.
- Busy barn today
- Switch of trainer which had notable impact with volunteers
    - Also meant different mount/dismount for client, causing some confusion
- Willie (horse), tired today, was "nippy" for the first time
    - Tired
    - Hurting?
- Stepping in to help with side-walking – complex
- Sound of birds
- Review of rules by trainer, when riding outside
    - Leader with horse
    - Side-walker with person
    - Person stay on horse

    - Say “door” when passing through doors
    - Don’t allow horses to eat grass
- Afternoon of situating new volunteer – putting tack on, encouraging safety, quiet, no rushing with horses
- Noted volunteer doing this the wrong way, taking off saddle, bridle wrong way, didn’t clean tack when putting it away and put tack in wrong location. Noted need to help some volunteers.
- Working with no hydro, dark.