

Horses in leisure events: a posthumanist exploration of commercial and cultural values

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Abstract

Horses currently play a leading role in many leisure events worldwide. However, their involvement in leisure activities raises various ethical questions. Based on a posthumanist approach, this study sought to explore the use and treatment of horses in a leisure event in Mexico. A participant observation method was adopted to conduct the research, revealing that horses become quite instrumental and commodified for humans, fulfilling intersecting entertainment, economic and cultural purposes. These results thus provide evidence of the prevailing anthropocentric and speciesist nature of horse-human interactions in leisure events. The findings include that, when horse-human relations become highly commercialised and are institutionally recognised as cultural heritage, a complete embracement of posthumanism is needed to dissolve basic horse-human dichotomies, but this remains a utopian ideal in tourism and leisure practices.

Introduction

In his work on the social-psychological causes of animal abuse, Agnew (1998) states that animal abuse can be defined as any act that contributes to an animal's pain or death or that otherwise threatens its welfare. Welfare is understood as both physical and mental wellbeing and the absence of pain and injuries (Dawkins, 1980). This abuse can involve active maltreatment or passive neglect or omission, as well as being physical, psychological or emotional; direct or indirect; and intentional or unintentional (Beirne, 1999). Animal abuse can be direct when it is intentional and it involves aggressive and violent behaviours such as torture and mutilation. The abuse can be indirect when

humans neglect an animal's basic care, such as insufficient food, defective shelter, inadequate veterinary care and abandonment (Fernández, 2013). This study recognises the existence of animal subjectivity and, therefore, animal abuse is considered to be any human act that directly or indirectly affects animals' mental, psychological or physical wellbeing, regardless of whether the act is deliberate or unintentional. This abuse, therefore, involves acts that can extend far beyond cruelty and inflicting physical pain.

From a criminalistics and sociology point of view, research on animal abuse is important because it is a factor that predisposes humans to social violence (Beirne, 1999; Cajal et al., 2018; Fernández, 2013). However, this perspective is quite anthropocentric and speciesist since the prejudiced view that animals are inferior to humans implies people have the right to own animals and the owners can do what they please with their animals (Sollund, 2011). Animals are sentient beings and thus can suffer and feel pain (Regan, 1986), which means they have the right not to be harmed (Beirne, 1999). Agnew (1998) further claims that examining the causes of animal abuse is important because animals are worthy of moral consideration in their own right. Therefore, to achieve a morally fair animal treatment and recognise animals as subjects on their own, it is necessary to contribute to the breakdown of boundaries and traditional ontologies to erase the human-animal divide.

Horses have been essential to the development of human societies throughout most regions of the world, but their use in the leisure sphere has considerably increased over time (Dashper, 2017; McGreevy, 2004). Horses are currently an important component of the leisure and tourism industries as these animals are part of sport activities such as jumping, cross-country racing, vaulting and playing polo, as well as equine therapy (Ollenburg, 2005). Tourism-related activities include guided horse treks, trail rides, riding camps, farm stays, training courses and competitions (Buchmann, 2017). Specific practices such as horse racing have also become a major lucrative leisure and tourism product in some countries (Jeong, Kim, Ko, Lee & Jeong, 2009). According to the Equine Heritage Institute, almost 60 million horses were found worldwide in 2006 (see www.equineheritageinstitute.org), and, by 2009, the total number of horses in the European Union was estimated to exceed 5 million (Liljenstolpe, 2009). These statistics suggest that horses are a quite profitable industry (Rephann, 2011).

In addition to leisure uses, horses – similar to other animals – can be assigned cultural value. Researchers have documented that animals have cultural significance for many societies. For example, in India, cows have a uniquely exalted status due to their deeply felt religious symbolism (Korom, 2000), and, in some Africa communities, indigenous cattle are particularly closely protected due to their connection with their owners' cultural values (Reist-Marti et al., 2003). As discussed further below, horses can become an important cultural component, but this makes them continuously vulnerable to abuse.

The use of horses to facilitate humans' leisure or cultural interests tends to involve both direct and indirect mistreatment. Equine abuse can be observed in acts such as overriding, whipping and transporting without feed, water or rest (American Humane Association, 2010). Other forms of mistreatment are horses that are used under unacceptable conditions for street rubbish collection (Tovar, 2019) or the use of drugs, electrical stimuli and whips in horse racing competitions (Fundación para el Asesoramiento y Acción en Defensa de los Animales [FAADA], n.d.). All these acts cause stress, injury or even horses' death. Steinbock (1978) argues that allowing animals – horses included – to suffer from neglect or for the sake of large profits can be considered cruelty.

Most of the limited theoretical and applied research on animal abuse has been done by philosophers (Regan, 1986; Singer, 1975; Steinbock, 1978), sociologists (Agnew, 1998) and criminologists (Beirne, 1999; Fernández, 2013). Leisure and tourism studies are fields largely dominated by anthropocentric approaches prioritising human experiences (Dashper & Brymer, 2019). However, only quite recently, tourism (Cohen, 2019; Fennell, 2012) and leisure scholars (Danby, Dashper & Finkel, 2019) have begun to question the ontological and ethical divide between humans and animals in tourism and leisure contexts. To date, the animal species and sociocultural contexts in which human-animal relations have been studied are still insufficient to ensure a broad understanding of the human-animal divide in tourism and leisure.

More specifically, despite the importance that horses have for contemporary leisure activities, little is known about their uses, treatment and even exploitation in the lucrative leisure industry. An exploration of these topics in developing countries could help to expand the existing understanding of how horse-human relations are shaped by

anthropocentrism. This study, therefore, sought to explore the uses and treatment of horses in a leisure event in Mexico. With the aim of recognising animals as sentient beings and therefore as subjects rather than objects of exploitation and human enjoyment, the research was based on a posthumanist approach with the goal of opening up new ways of thinking about horse-human relations in tourism and leisure events.

Literature review

Posthumanism

Human-animal relations have been largely based on anthropocentric and speciesist moral views. Anthropocentrism refers to the idea that humans are superior to any other living or non-living species and that human interests should be favoured over the interests of nonhuman entities. Speciesism, in turn, defends the preferential consideration and treatment of certain individuals based on their species membership (Faria & Paez, 2014). Humans' perceived moral superiority over any other entity has led them to treat animals as property, resources or commodities that satisfy human interests, thereby stripping away animals' value as individuals (Fennell, 2012). Animals are usually reduced to a species-level identity and only considered if humans are affected by their actions or behaviours (Danby et al., 2019).

Posthumanism opposes anthropocentrism and speciesism because posthumanism understands the 'social' world as 'more than a human' world (Braun, 2004, p. 272). It seeks to erase the human-animal divide by recognising the existence of both human and non-human subjectivity and putting animals and humans on the same level (Cohen, 2019). From a posthumanism perspective, animals are sentient beings and thus can suffer and feel pain and have an interest in avoiding pain and suffering. Similar to humans, animals have leading attributes such as perception, memory, self-consciousness and a sense of the future (Regan, 1986). Thus, animals satisfy the criteria for subjects-of-a-life, and thus they possess inherent value and have the right to respectful treatment and not to be harmed (Beirne, 1999). Humans have direct duties to animals in their care based on animals' inherent worth (Dashper, 2017).

Singer (1975) argues in his pioneering work *Animal Liberation* that equality between humans and animals is a moral ideal that clearly does not depend on intelligence, moral capacity, physical attributes or any other differentials. Instead, this ideal is based on how animals, like humans, are sentient beings. Faria and Paez (2014) put it this way:

Since sentience is precisely the capacity that makes it possible for a being to be affected in positive (pleasure) and negative ways (suffering), moral consideration should therefore be extended to include all sentient nonhuman beings as well. Since sentience is, at least, a sufficient condition for full moral consideration, anthropocentric speciesism is unjustified. (pp. 101–102)

Unlike animal rights perspectives, in which animals 'must be viewed as the experiencing subjects of a life, with inherent value of their own' (Regan, 1986, p. 186), posthumanism recognises the need to understand the subjectivity of animals. According to Bornemark (2019), posthumanism suggests that subjectivity can no longer be thought of as exclusively human and therefore denies human exceptionalism and supremacy; it therefore calls for a reconceptualisation of animal-human relationships. Posthumanism thus asks for a far-reaching revision of humans' perceptions and relationships with nonhuman animals (Cohen, 2019).

Posthumanism is a quite controversial philosophy because it demands rethinking and restructuring historically prevalent cultural beliefs and structures. It threatens dominant animal-based human interests such as food, clothing, entertainment, social prestige and economic benefits arising from animal use. However, Cohen (2019) observes that posthumanism can have a positive effect on humans' sensitisation to animals' rights, thereby reducing animal abuse.

In this framework, this study seeks to go beyond considering humans as the only centre of academic interest in tourism and leisure studies. By doing so, it not only seeks to recognise horses (and other animals) as sentient beings but also to acknowledge their subjectivities. It thus decentres humans in the study of horse-human interactions, and contributes to eroding human exceptionalism and blurring the boundaries between human and nonhuman animals. It considers horses as subjects with the same value as humans and therefore as beings that deserve the pursuit of their welfare. For this

purpose, this paper adopted the following basic premises of posthumanism (Cohen, 2019):

- Posthumanism seeks to erase the human-nonhuman animal divide
- Posthumanism denies human exceptionalism on ontological and ethical grounds
- Posthumanism recognises the existence of human and non-human subjectivity

Horses in leisure and tourism

Human-horse relationships have taken many different forms and have been understood based on the roles that horses perform within societies (Robinson, 1999). Horses have historically fulfilled key functions in agriculture, transport and warfare and have long been a symbol of freedom and power (Dashper, 2017). In Europe, horses are currently vital to industries, agriculture, transport, the military, leisure and sport, as well as serving as food and working companions (Liljenstolpe, 2009).

Horses have been assigned an important role particularly in the leisure and tourism industries. Within tourism, for example, they are the core component of equestrian tourism (Ollenburg, 2005), and they have even been used as part of destination branding strategies (Buchmann, 2017). In addition, the economic value of horse-based activities is widely recognised since researchers have found that equine tourism can be more economically beneficial than any other tourism activities in some regions (Kim, Hallab & Smith, 2008). Gilbert and Gillett (2012) claim that, '[w]hereas [they were] once central to agriculture, industry and transportation, the new social realm for horses is limited primarily to sport, leisure and recreation pursuits' (p. 632), whose profitability is well established (Jeong et al., 2009; Rephann, 2011).

In some developing countries such as Mexico, many horses are still work under unacceptable conditions to perform tasks, including collecting rubbish on the streets (Tovar, 2019), but, in developed countries, horses currently fulfil mainly recreational purposes (Ollenburg, 2005). In Britain, for example, riding as a leisure activity has spread widely across different sociodemographic groups and reflects the democratisation of horse-based leisure pursuits (Dashper, 2017). Horse riding has become one of the most popular tourism and leisure activities for visitors in some parts of the United States (US) (Kim et al., 2008). Recreational horse riding has evolved through time into equestrian competitive disciplines such as jumping competitions,

cross-country races, vaulting competitions, polo, endurance races and three-day events, as well as equestrian therapy (Ollenburg, 2005). Similarly, in tourism contexts, horse-based activities include guided horse treks, trail rides, riding camps, farm stays, training courses, competitions, horse-related conferences and horse-drawn carriage rides (Buchmann, 2017). Specific practices such as horse racing have also become a major leisure and tourism product in countries such as South Korea (Jeong et al., 2009).

The treatment that horses receive from humans is highly dependent on the role that these animals play in serving human interests. Horses are the most common animals participating in human sport (Dashper, 2017). Especially in the case of sport horses, the presence of both horses and humans is essential to successful partnerships, so humans tend to recognise horses' subjectivities as important. In this context, human-horse relations are characterised – unlike relations with many other animals – by trust, mutual respect, empathy, care and affection. Interactions can become so intimate and affective that humans can consider horses, according to Dashper (2014), to be honorary family members.

Researchers have, however, demonstrated that sport horses tend to receive special care from their owners and riders, including proper nutrition, veterinary care and routine care not for the horses' welfare but to continue guaranteeing human pleasure (Dashper, 2014). Because horse competitions, in particular, can offer many economic benefits (Jönsson, 2012), human-sport horse relationships have become largely transactional and instrumental. Sport ponies, for example, are highly valued for their athletic ability, small stature and soft temperament – characteristics that enhance greater commercialisation (Gilbert & Gillett, 2012).

Leisure studies have demonstrated that human relations with horses, in particular, are more diverse, intimate, long, complex and collaborative when they serve leisure purposes (Danby et al., 2019). Nonetheless, forcing horses to perform for humans can also be regarded as a form of animal abuse. Dashper (2017) argues that the inclusion of horses in sport and leisure activities raises various ethical issues regarding the most moral way to treat horses, obligations towards them and human-horse power relations. In sport and leisure activities including tourism, horses cannot give their informed consent to be part of satisfying humans' interests (Jönsson, 2012), so unbalanced power relations and horse coercion is often the result. According to Jönsson (2012), horses can

be not only physically or mentally harmed but also symbolically harmed by the simple act of humans subjecting horses to being used and exploited for humans' benefit.

Some experts argue that horse participation in human leisure activities can also be enjoyable for horses and that some equestrian activities have the potential for equality between humans and horses based on co-operative dimensions (Jönsson, 2012). Horse-based leisure activities such as trail riding can be a 'pleasurable' experience for horses due to the lack of structural and environmental constraints to which they must ordinarily submit. However, open-air activities in human-built environments can be stressful for horses as they are exposed to a variety of hazards such as road traffic and potentially frightening sounds (Dashper & Brymer, 2019).

Horses have increasingly become an object of economic value negotiations (Gilbert & Gillett, 2012). In lucrative leisure markets, horses are forced to conform to human expectations of which horses have minimal awareness, increasing the chances of horse abuse and exploitation (Dashper, 2017). In situations in which affection and care interact with leisure and commercial interests, '[t]he horse human relationship is thus fraught with contradictions and tensions between ethics of care, respect, and responsibility, and . . . output-focused pressures' (Dashper, 2014, p. 353). Whether horses fulfil sport, work, health or other purposes – regardless of any pleasure horses allegedly experience – they remain subordinate to human interests and desires. In equine-based leisure activities, horses will invariably be subject to anthropocentric coercion, domination and submission.

The study

Setting

This study sought to explore how horses are used and treated in a leisure event in Mexico. In Mexico, people have apparently become more aware of animals as sentient beings and, consequently, of their right to decent treatment. Recent research in this country, for example, has revealed that consumers and livestock hauliers show high levels of empathy with animals' needs, feelings and emotions and recognise animals as sentient beings (Valadez-Noriega et al., 2018). People in Mexico may thus be interested in farm animals' welfare and its ethical, sociological and economic implications, similar

to individuals in other parts of the world (Miranda-de la Lama et al., 2017). This growing awareness of animal rights has led to the passing of legislation on some human-animal relationships in Mexico. In the south, for example, animal protection and welfare laws have recently been passed to prohibit bullfighting and cockfighting for leisure and tourist purposes (Vázquez, 2019).

Horses in Mexico have long served traditional purposes such as agriculture, transport, work, sport and leisure activities, and therefore the supremacy of humans over horses is unquestionable. Together with mules and donkeys, horses in Mexico were – and in some parts of the country are still – used to pull carts and ploughs and carry people and excessive loads. In these areas, horses are often physically abused, inadequately fed and, in general, neglected (de Aluja, 1998; Tovar, 2019). In this vein, many horses in Mexico are exploited and mistreated, and, in some urban areas, they are forced to pull heavy garbage collection carts and they die from being subjected to traumatic, unacceptable conditions that result in dehydration, malnutrition and diseases (Vice, 2019). Recently, the Animal Protection and Welfare Law has been updated in some parts of Mexico so that this legislation prohibits the use of animals in loading and pulling activities in urban areas (Carrizales, 2019). Horses are now part of these protected animal groups. The laws also recognise that horses have historically played a leading role in Mexican culture. As part of *charrería*, they have long been valued as an important component of the Mexican national identity (Palomar, 2004). Horses are specifically a core element in *charrería*, a traditional cultural practice considered a national sport that includes livestock herding skills such as roping and reining wild mares and bulls.

By 2015, the number of horses in the country was estimated to be around 7 million, increasing by 10 percent a year (Informador, 2015). The increasing number of horses in the country makes guarantees of their wellbeing necessary regardless of the work, sport or cultural role assigned to them. For many Mexicans, what constitutes horse abuse is subjective; therefore, for posthumanist interests, re-establishing current human-horse relationships remains a challenge. The mistreatment of horses is only considered present when these animals experience pain as a result of how humans treat them. Otherwise, people do not usually see owners' behaviour as abusive (Redacción, 2019). This prevalent attitude requires raising individuals' awareness about not only the many

dimensions of equine abuse but also the need to pass legislation preventing animal mistreatment.

The Feria Internacional del Caballo Texcoco 2019 (FICT) (Texcoco International Horse Fair 2019) was selected as a case study. This event was first held in 1974, and it has become an important leisure and tourism attraction for the region. The fair is a four-week (i.e. 29 March–28 April 2019) event offering musical, dance, food, entertainment, cattle exhibition and cultural activities. In 2019, the event was expected to draw around 6,000 visitors and generate over 2,000 temporary jobs (Divergencias Informativas, 2019). Equine activities are a major component of the fair.

Methods

The present study applied a participant observation method. Jorgensen (1989) asserts that this type of method is particularly useful when the phenomenon under investigation is observable and limited in size and location and the research questions focus on human interactions – all of which applied to the current study. A peripheral membership role was assumed (Adler & Adler, 1987) in which the researchers became observers of human-animal settings but did not actively engage in the core activities (e.g. horse rides).

Descriptive, focused and selective observations were conducted based on Spradley's (1980) guidelines. While the descriptive observations aimed to identify and record the event's general physical and nonphysical features, the focused observations addressed its animal dimensions. The selective observations sought to identify, interpret and analyse the horses' conditions, in particular, including these animals' uses and human-horse interactions. von Essen and Bornemark (2019) claim that, from a posthumanist approach, the subjectivity of horses has become a central component of analysis. The authors point out that the will, experiences and feelings of horses should be considered to understand the social relationships shared between humans and horses. To achieve this, this study's observations focused on the manifestations of the horses' will to participate in events (e.g. rearing), their experiences (e.g. socialisation with other horses) and feelings that were somehow perceived (e.g. anger). From a posthumanist perspective, special attention was also paid to recording the cases of supremacy of humans over horses (e.g. domination), but also cases of empathy and interspecies

bonding. Figure 1 lists the specific issues on which the different types of observations focused.

Figure 1 here. Observation stages and issues observed.

A total of 16 observations were recorded. They were carried out from 30 March to 27 April 2019. Descriptive observations were carried out in each area of the fairground. The main zones included were the rides area, manège (in Spanish, picadero), commercial areas, food area, music theatre, stables, interactive farm and bullring. Focused observations were carried out in areas in which the animals' presence was evident, such as the rides, commercial areas, farm, manège and food area. Selective observations were made exclusively at sites involving horses, including the manège, stables and specific spots where the horses' permanent presence had previously been recorded. An observation template was designed and used for recording field notes. Some observations were audio recorded and then transcribed onto the template. Bornemark (2019) claims that if horses are considered subjects, they need to be seen as part of a culture and society created by both horses and humans. Therefore, the voices of humans contributed to understanding horses' subjectivity. Informal conversations were held with riders, owners and horse handlers, who revealed additional details and confirmed information about horses' subjectivities, uses, conditions, treatment and meaning. Excerpts from these conversations, together with spectators and visitors' comments at the fair, were also recorded in field notes.

Photographs were taken to provide evidence as they add further types of information (Fairweather & Swaffield, 2002), having previously been proved to be useful for capturing complex social situations in leisure events (Davies, Ritchie & Jaimangal-Jones, 2015). Photographs are regarded as an excellent instrument with which to note observations when a literal visual record is needed (Jorgensen, 1989). The photographs sought to capture manifestations of horses' conditions, uses, treatments, and perceptible feelings during the event. Printed materials such as the event's general programme and small event promotional materials were also collected because they provide information on specific events in which animals are involved.

The analysis of the information recorded followed Jorgensen's (1989) suggestions. Each observation record was disassembled into components and examined for patterns and

relationships – some connected to ideas derived from the literature and posthumanism postulations and others that emerged during the fieldwork. Bornemark (2019) argues that although humans may not be able to fully understand and conceptualise horses' experiences, we need to use what humans and horses have in common in order to understand them; this includes emotions, cognition and sensitivity - even if they are structured and experienced differently. For a post-humanist analysis, manifestations of the feelings and behavior of horses such as relaxation, anxiety, anger and stereotypic behaviors were examined. This allowed gaining an understanding of the experiences and subjectivities of the horses.

The relationships that both researchers have had with horses proved extremely useful in terms of understanding and enhancing sensitivity to horses' uses and treatment at the fair. The researchers have had close connections with horses for years. One has owned horses and ridden since childhood, and the other has taken lessons at a professional level in horse riding, dressage and charrería. In addition, a part of their interest in horses has been providing documentation related to equine ethology. All these experiences have contributed extensively to the researchers' understanding of horses' uses and conditions, as well as what Dashper (2017) calls an ability to 'listen to horses'.

Notably, one researcher has attended the fair each year for the last 10 years. His personal interest in equestrian activities has allowed him to gain extensive knowledge about horses' uses and treatment during the fair each year. As in other related studies (Dashper, 2014), these previous experiences were treated as valuable sources of information and complementary to the observations made exclusively for the present research. Reflections on these previous experiences with horses confirmed many of the results presented below.

Findings

The recorded equine activities were grouped into four major categories of horse use: entertainment and health, exhibitions, sport and competitions, and commercialisation. From a posthumanism approach, many of these activities are morally questionable not only because the horses are used to satisfy human interests but also because some activities imply clear active, intentional and direct physical mistreatment of horses. The

following sections describe each category and specify the activities with higher levels of abuse recorded.

Entertainment and health

This category includes activities such as equine therapy, pony races and rides (in Spanish, paseos). These activities all take place in the fair's manège. All activities there are free of charge, so it is one of the most visited, dynamic, family-friendly and busy areas. Some equine therapy demonstrations are given to the public.

In this therapy, horses are regarded as co-therapists and help humans to reduce their psychological distress and enhance their psychological wellbeing, among other benefits (Klontz, Bivens, Leinart & Klontz, 2007). Being with horses is therapeutic, alleviating individuals' stress levels and helping them cope with mental health issues (Danby & Hannam, 2017). Veterinarian research has demonstrated that therapeutic riding does not increase horses' stress levels (McKinney, Mueller & Frank, 2015), and, because of the type of movements required, horses are not at risk of physical injuries, at least in comparison with, for example, sport activities. Since equine therapy does not involve evident physical or emotional maltreatment and the horses are used to improve humans' health, this therapy could be considered less morally questionable. However, from a posthumanist perspective, horses' submission to humans in equine therapy is still undeniable. In equine therapy, as in other equestrian practices, the instrumentalisation of horses to meet humans' interests is clear. While horses can be recognised as sentient and subjective beings, the subjectivities of humans remain supreme.

Pony races are also part of the event. These races are more for entertainment and fun than for gambling, as is often the case in the lucrative horse racing industry (Jeong et al., 2009). In one race observed, a pony was ridden by a tall man whose legs were longer than the pony's. Whips were used to make the ponies run faster.

Although horse races do not take place at the fair, together with cockfights and jaripeos (i.e. a rodeo-type activity), horse races are an important tradition in many parts of Mexico. Due to the races' cultural, entertainment and commercial value in this country, legislators' recent attempts to ban horse racing and other animal-based activities have failed (Jiménez, 2019). In races, horses are subjected to harsh training and performance-

enhancing treatments such as drugs, electrical stimuli and whips. Consequently, hundreds of horses die in races from fatal falls, broken bones or heart attacks (FAADA, n.d.). Donkey races – more precisely human-pulled donkey races – are also part of FICT's programme, but they are only held for fun.

Rides at the fair are particularly important in analyses of animal abuse. These rides consist of short (i.e. a couple of minutes) rides for visitors within the picadero. For a fee, visitors can ride horses that are usually large and 'beautiful' – only accompanied by an expert rider. The recorded observations noted over 20 horses used for rides at one time. In some cases, up to three people simultaneously rode on the same horse. Based on information gathered from an informal conversation with an expert rider, horses can provide around 100 rides a day, starting at 11 in the morning and continuing up to 9 at night. Rides are offered every single day of the event. They generate money for the owners and expert riders, so the more rides they give, the more profitable the activity becomes for them. This is definitely an extremely lucrative horse activity at the fair (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 here. Horse and pony rides are offered in the picadero.

According to conversations with other expert horse riders in the fair, ride horses are the most exploited horses in the fair not only because of the long hours they work but also because of the lower standards of food and care to which these horses are subjected. Their conditions are compared unfavourably with those of horses that are, for example, for breeding, competition or sale. These animals' perceptions of abuse, however, are highly dependent on what exploitation means to handlers.

Other activities described below are also clear instances of exploitation and abuse. Unlike other horses, ride horses stay in improvised stalls during the fair's duration. As shown in Figure 2 above, ponies are also used for rides – although they are actually pulled against their will to get them to move. The use of whips with horses and ponies is ever present. Pony rides are cheaper than those on horses, and, unlike horses, ponies are pulled and ridden mostly by children. Pregnant mares and ponies are also used for rides.

Exhibitions

This category includes viewings, breed shows, dressage events and, more importantly, photograph opportunities. Many horses are kept in stalls, waiting to be used or sold. Separating horses into stalls can be regarded as a type of indirect abuse as it limits their ability to socialise with other horses (McGreevy, 2004). Socialisation is considered by ethologists to be a need for horses and, therefore, a preferable condition that ensures their welfare (Lofoso, 2012). However, this is an equine issue that many handlers seem to ignore.

FICT visitors wander around viewing and taking pictures with the horses. Although signs say 'No tocar' (Don't touch), many visitors – both adults and children – touch the horses. Purebreds also fall within this category of activities. These horses' morphology is judged for each breed represented. Naturally, humans' construction of beauty, elegance and pureness of breed define each horse's suitability to be a winner and thus more appreciated and valued and better treated.

Although dressage is also a competition activity, at this fair, dressage is more an exhibition of horses' skills. Dressage has increased in popularity around the world. This activity is regarded as the ultimate expression of horse training and elegance and of an intense connection between human and equine athletes (Fédération Equestre Internationale, 2016). However, dressage training requirements may contribute to laming horses, which has been found to be the most common injury among dressage horses (Murray, Walters, Snart, Dyson & Parkin, 2010). Spectators may perceive horses' participation as elegant, but humans tend to be unaware of the demanding training needed between shows and its implications for horses.

Taking photographs of horses is a quite common use and, therefore, requires special consideration. Five spots were clearly identified within the FICT premises where horses are used in photographs. Huge, 'beautiful' and breed horses are strapped into elegant saddles, standing in one place for visitors to sit on (i.e. without moving) and to have an instantly printed picture taken for about five US dollars. Observation records suggest that horses, always the same ones, can stand from midday until midnight or later. Horses fulfilling this purpose were recorded at work up to 2 in the morning, and the fair closes at around 3 a.m. every day. They stand on a concrete floor on which they urinate and defecate (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 here. Horses and ponies are used for photograph taking.

For photographs, horses are kept saddled, tightly reined from the saddle horn and tied to the floor all the time, so their movements are restricted. In general, the same horses can be found always in the same spot, position and conditions during the entire fair. A relevant question in this context is whether owners are aware that tight reins can cause discomfort, pain and physical damage, as well as somatic disorders such as dorsal displacement of the soft palate (Warren-Smith, Curtis, Greetham & McGreevy, 2007) (see Figure 4). For many visitors, taking photographs can be harmless to horses; this reveals not only that humans maintain a superlative status over horses but that they ignore their emotions and sensitivity as living creatures.

Figure 4 here. Horses used in photographs are saddled, tightly reined in and tied to the ground.

When used in photographs, horses are kept out in the sun with no shade during the entire four-week event. Ponies – even those with young offspring – are also used for this purpose (see Figures 5 and 6). As these pictures suggest, the horses and ponies' tiredness, thirst, submission, resignation and sadness remain secondary to visitors' desire to have a memento of the event.

Figures 5 and 6 here. Ponies are used in photographs.

Sport and competitions

Dashper (2014) argues that equestrian sport has moved towards a highly commercialised model and that the use of horses in sport may be more concerned with basking in reflected glory than ensuring animal welfare. This trend can have serious consequences for horses. Jumping and barrel racing competitions were also observed to be part of the FICT programme, but charrería merits special attention as this is considered Mexico's national sport.

Charrería consists of nine activities for men, which involve the use of cattle, horses and, more specifically, mares to prove men's skill, strength, courage and superiority over animals. Horses are intensively used in this sport. The activities include bringing bulls down, steer-tailing, stopping running mares with lariats, roping horses and causing them to fall and roll, chasing horses, roping and riding bulls, riding bareback on horses

and riding untrained mares (in Spanish, jineteadero de yegua). The event hosted the FICT's second charrería competition, which lasted six days, and horse and cattle use was an essential part of the competition.

Various cases can illustrate the diverse ways in which horses are mistreated, but jineteadero de yegua can be especially illustrative of direct, intentional abuse. In jineteadero, untrained horses – often mares – are ridden with a bull rope and no saddle or rein. On 27 April, the following observation (i.e. a summary) was recorded:

Seven mares are in a small improvised corral. Unlike other horses, none of them have a saddle or rein, nor do they have any protection on their legs. Before their turn to be ridden arrives, men shout at and scare them to keep them alert. I got as close to them as I could and observed that all of them, without exception, show scars on different parts of the body, mainly on the spine and face. Each mare is forcibly prepared to be ridden. Once the rider is ready, an electric stick is used to make the mares desperately run and jump. The rider did not fall, and the mare ended up subdued. The audience cheered. The mare came back agitated and stressed, bleeding from a sore on her forehead [see Figure 7]. The next mare had already been prepared so that the show could continue.

Figure 7 here. Mares bleed after being used in jineteadero.

Animals' use in charrería has faced criticism as a form of animal abuse. Some legislators have tried to ban it, but they have completely failed in Mexico. This failure is due to not only charrería's heritage and cultural value as the national sport par excellence but also its advocates' conviction that charrería does not involve animal abuse (García, 2018), which shows that perceptions of animal abuse are quite subjective. Accordingly, if the ideals of posthumanism are intended to be achieved, it is necessary to get a transformed understanding of subjectivity of human beings.

In addition, the international recognition that charrería has gained has helped it to endure. Because of its cultural significance, charrería was added to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2016. This official status has reinforced charrería supporters' pride in their sport's place in national culture, heritage and identity and

legitimated the use – and abuse – of animals. Horses are thus considered an essential, though still instrumental, component of Mexican cultural heritage.

Horse dancing competitions are also included in this category. The event holds the FICT dancing horse competition, in which over 50 horses are used in competitive events. Horses often wear luxurious saddles and reins as both the riders and horses' appearance is judged. Each horse 'dances' one complete song – selected by its rider – on a wooden platform. The competition has rules, for example, more points if the horse shows rhythm, raises its legs high enough and dances without stepping off the platform. Lower points are given if the horse is continuously punished with reins, whips or spurs or if the horse's hooves step off the platform. Disqualification occurs if the horse refuses to dance, it is 'too often' punished or the rider causes the horse to bleed before and/or during the competition. This last rule suggests an interest exists in ensuring the participating horses' welfare, although the judges' concept of abuse is clearly associated primarily with pain and blood; this conception of abuse is evidently anthropocentric and denies other possible dimensions of equine sensitivity.

These specific rules against punishment suggest that horses are vulnerable to riders' abuse during training or competitions, and many times they are clearly mistreated. From an animal welfare perspective, the practices that often lie behind horse dancing in some parts of Mexico is a particularly important aspect. According to Protectora de Caballos (2016):

The level of training is tremendously high, and the rider needs to demonstrate a supposed coordination between human and animal. . . . [H]orses are tied between two pillars [and] whipped from behind to trot[,] but [the ropes] keep them fixed . . . [by] the mouth and head. As soon as they learn to jog in the same place, trainers will start hitting their front legs using whips. That way, the horse will lift its legs higher to escape the pain. (n/par.)

Some researchers have hypothesised that horses cannot synchronise their movements with a musical beat (Bregman, Iversen, Lichman, Reinhart & Patel, 2012), so whether horses can actually 'dance' remains questionable. This is evidently an activity that satisfies human interests and goes against horses' natural behaviour.

Commercialisation

Horse selling is extremely popular in the FICT. As stated previously, various horses are exhibited in stalls, and many of them are for sale. Stalls have signs that indicate the horse's name, breed, age, colour, farm, owner, height and contact telephone (see Figure 8).

Figure 8 here. The sign shows that this purebred Spanish horse is for sale.

Breed is a feature that determines prices, but another valuable attribute also counts: schooling. Schooling refers to what horses 'know how to do' – or actually have been trained to do, which can include skills such as 'dancing', 'bowing', 'sitting' and lying, as well as piaffe. The 'type of schooling' is also a valuable differentiating factor. That is, whether horses have been trained for charrería, jumping competitions or dressage makes them useful for specific purposes and, therefore, different on a commercial level. Ponies are also put up for sale although in smaller numbers. Unlike horses, however, they are often exhibited in groups (i.e. several in one stall), and their features are not displayed for potential buyers. Ponies do not tend to be schooled.

Rephann (2011) states that horses' breeds and uses in either races, shows or competitions have a differentiating effect on total expenditures on horses. The cited author observes that some horses require owners to spend more on training. Horses' training is reflected in their economic value, as was confirmed by the present study.

To say that all uses and treatment of horses at the fair are abusive would be biased. Of course this depends on the conception that one has of animal abuse, which is shaped by the parameters that we have defined anthropocentrically. Interspecies bonding also takes place on the fairground. Informal conversations revealed that some owners and handlers of horses can develop ties of affection with their horses. Some individuals consider their horses family members and thus an important part of their daily lives. This confirms Dashper's (2014) findings that riders and owners may form strong relationships with horses. The present observations revealed that those individuals who feel affection for their horses take care of these animals. This care includes feeding them on time, providing veterinary care, keeping them in the shade, brushing them, cleaning their hooves and, in some cases, taking them out for walks. Some spectators also seem to be concerned about the horses' mistreatment, with comments such as 'poor horses' recorded during shows.

Other indicators of caring for horses were also detected. Veterinary care was available at the event, although observation records revealed that the veterinarian's office was not always open for service. The rides had regulations regarding the use of horses, but these guidelines appeared to be followed mainly to guarantee the users' welfare. The rules for riding in the manège were 1) horses are rented at the riders' own risk, 2) horses are not rented to drunk people, 3) galloping is not allowed, 4) only one adult rider is allowed per horse or an adult accompanied by a child under six years old and 5) the manège is not responsible for lost items. No other areas of the fair had any regulations – at least visible ones – that guaranteed horses were well treated. As the above examples show, horse-riding rules prioritise humans' welfare, and the meaning of what is good or bad equine care is quite subjective.

Discussion

Cajal et al. (2018) argue that animal abuse includes human behaviours that cause unnecessary pain or stress to animals, including negligence in basic care and actions that intentionally cause animals' death. Cohen (2019) adds that, from a posthumanist perspective, animal abuse in tourism and leisure activities occurs in animal shows, animal performances and human-animal contests. This broader conceptualisation indicates that various forms of horse abuse and exploitation regularly take place at the fair under study.

However, not all the fair's uses of horses involve the same degree of abuse. The use of electric prods and whips and evidence of cuts and scars are unquestionably direct abuse or signs of past abuse and thus less morally acceptable. Other acts such as horses standing for pictures for long hours or humans overriding and keeping horses in small stalls (i.e. limiting these animals' natural ability to socialise) for the entire event can be considered indirect abuse. Although these acts are considered morally acceptable, they represent a more subtle form of abuse. From a posthumanist perspective, horses' cognitive, emotional and sensitive dimensions are not completely taken care of. Such acts can generate stress in horses, which eventually can have a damaging effect on these animals' welfare (Moberg & Mench, 2000).

Several factors influence the views that humans have about horses and thus the way they are treated. Agnew (1998) argues that, in leisure activities, for example, individuals

may be unaware of the consequences of using animals to serve their personal interests. Handlers, for instance, may be ignorant of how keeping horses in stalls constrains their ability to socialise, which is an important need (McGreevy, 2004), and from a posthumanism approach this lack of awareness reflects that humans may not fully recognise horses' subjectivity. The latter cited author also suggests that animals can be abused when humans' dislike their behaviours, such as whipping when horses do not dance energetically enough or when the abuse gives humans greater status or prestige and earns them recognition for their strength.

In the case of horses in Mexico, whipping, lassoing, riding wild mares, and engaging in other charrería activities provide men in particular with a sense of cultural identity and domination, thereby strengthening their notions of masculinity. This result is similar to that of other activities, such as bullfighting, in which animals are made to submit to prove humans' superiority (Quintero Venegas & López López, 2018). In any of these situations, human interests and values – rather than those of animals – are considered superior. From an animal rights and welfare perspective, Jönsson (2012) asserts that equestrian leisure activities are morally indefensible.

The issue of whether the use of horses – and animals in general – for recreational purposes is morally acceptable has not been fully considered by the tourism and leisure industries. Fennell (2012) observes that, for the tourism industry, as long as animals' wellbeing is taken care of and their suffering is limited, their use in entertainment and associated recreational activities is considered ethical. The present study confirmed that, the leisure industry, which is strongly characterised by profitability and competition, does not focus on horses' rights, welfare, wellbeing or interests. Instead, stakeholders in leisure activities concentrate on horses' maintenance solely for further human use, exploitation and cultural conservation. In this context, the results support Regan's (1986) finding that:

Because [horses] are treated routinely, [and] systematically as if their value were reducible to their usefulness to . . . [riders, owners, trainers and visitors], they [horses] are routinely, [and] systematically treated with a lack of respect, and thus . . . their rights [are] routinely, [and] systematically violated. (p. 188)

Beirne (1999) claims that animals of different species have contrasting interests and thus to treat them 'equally' would be to mistreat them. The present study also revealed that different species such as horses, ponies and donkeys are treated differently in the leisure event under study. According to Jerolmack (2008), some animals are appreciated because of their beauty, rareness or usefulness, while many others become social problems and pests so they are considered undesirable by humans.

In addition, the current research showed that scholars should also analyse how the members of one species are treated differently not because humans recognise the needs of particular individuals of the species but because humans assign value to different members of the same species. Not all horses are treated equally in FICT as their use and treatment varies depending on their breed, 'beauty', sex, size, farm, schooling history and features, which are all assigned significance and value by humans. This study's results indicate that equine use and treatment in leisure events are not only based on anthropocentrism but also on patterns that can be called 'intra-speciesism'. That is, humans give differentiated and preferential consideration to members of the same species – horses in this case – based on their biological and human-led characteristics.

Cohen (2019) argues that, since posthumanism encourages a paradigmatic shift in human-animal interactions, it poses a serious challenge to providers of tourism and leisure activities. Animals are often an important, lucrative component of the tourist industry. In both the tourism and leisure industries, animals are used for food (Kline, 2018), as entertainment in leisure spaces such as zoos (Fennell, 2013), in hunting activities (Komppula & Gartner, 2013; Novelli & Humavindu 2005), transportation (Duffy & Moore, 2010; Ollenburg, 2005), competition (Jeong et al., 2009) and therapeutic psychological and physical health services (Krause-Parello, Gulick & Basin, 2019). All of these uses specifically respond to tourists and recreationists' demands and, therefore, to these industries' economic interests.

In the case of events such as the one examined in the present study, horses and horse-based activities are major lucrative leisure attractions, and this commercial perspective poses a significant challenge to horses' welfare. Dashper (2014; 2017) asserts that, while many riders and owners would not deliberately harm horses, commercial pressures are encouraging a more instrumental attitude towards horses and reducing them to the status of commodities to be exploited. From a posthumanist perspective, the use of

animals in shows, performances and human-animal contests should be condemned as animal abuse (Cohen, 2019). The horse-based activities reported in the current research, including those fostered by cultural interests, reveal that anthropocentric and speciesist positions on horses are approved of and continuously reinforced. Horses in contemporary societies must thus meet both the cultural and economic demands of an expanding equestrian industry (Gilbert & Gillett, 2012). Activities involving horse abuse such as charrería and bullfights are highly commercialised and institutionalised as national sports or even cultural heritage. This suggests that posthumanist ideals seeking to erase the divide between humans and horses are far from becoming a reality.

Within a posthumanist framework, the horses' feelings, welfare and subjectivities are equally important. Posthumanism proved to be extremely useful in this study as a way to recognise that, as living, sentient and subjective beings, horses deserve a life free of human violence and exploitation. It provided philosophical premises to try to decentre humans from perceptions of human-horse relationships and to 'listen to' the horses. Although horses build some experiences together with humans, the posthumanism approach of this study allowed us to analyse some experiences and subjectivities of horses. To decentre humans from human-horse relationship studies, the subject of this research was not humans but horses. This study examined horses as subjects that deserve more decent relationships with other species simply because they are sentient beings; from a posthumanism perspective, horses constitute an equally valuable category amongst a range of different kind of actors.

This application of posthumanism encourages a re-orientation of perspectives away from the current anthropocentric tendency to prioritise horse riders, owners and handlers. In fact, based on the philosophical approach adopted, this study suggests that horse subjectivity can no longer be understood in anthropocentric ways. Although both horses and humans are living and sentient creatures, their being is structured differently and therefore should not be treated as equal. Thus, what humans have understood and reported as equine happiness, joy, pain and suffering needs to be resignified and understood from non-anthropocentric perspectives. If a true transformation is sought, the cognition, emotions, feelings and experiences of horses should now be examined through paradigms in which humans are not the centre of the world.

In this vein, Bornemark (2019) recognises that as humans we can never know if we have understood horses' experiences and subjectivities right or if they at all can be conceptualised in human language. The author argues however that we cannot neglect that horses and human have much in common simply by the fact of being living and sentient creatures. The combination of posthumanism, the etic approach adopted in this research and the close relationships between the researchers and horses facilitated an understanding of horses' subjectivities.

Posthumanism faces a variety of criticisms – among them the absence of animals' moral reciprocity and sensibility to other species' suffering (Cohen, 2019) – but this approach can significantly contribute to sensitising humans to how they treat horses. Given that individuals must change their beliefs before they can change their habits (Regan, 1986), posthumanism could change the anthropocentric and speciesist positions that determine how horses and other animals should be valued and thus treated. Regan (1986) acknowledges that changing people's beliefs about animals' inherent value is quite complicated, as well as demanding and exhausting. However, Cohen (2019) suggests that the posthumanist insistence on animal's rights and critique of anthropocentrism can contribute to reducing animal abuse in the tourism and leisure industries.

Conclusion

In response to the lack of research on horses' use and treatment in leisure activities in many economic and cultural contexts, the current study sought to explore horses' functions and treatment in a specific leisure event in Mexico. This research adopted a posthumanist approach in order to understand and clarify these uses on the basis of human-horse divides. From a posthumanism perspective, this study aimed to decentre humans by considering horses as experiencing subjects of a life with inherent value rather than as resources for the benefit of humans. It also recognised that as sentient beings with their own subjectivity, horses and humans need to be placed on the same level, therefore destabilising hierarchical ontological boundaries between both species.

According to Fennell (2013), anthropocentric practices always give precedence to humans' interests over any other entity's needs. More specifically, Cohen (2019) argues that animals in leisure and tourism activities have been treated as objects mechanically

reacting to tourists' desires. The present study thus concluded that humans' frequently intersecting economic, cultural and recreational interests still largely supersede horses' welfare.

Dashper (2014) reports that horses' role has changed in human societies from a largely functional, work-based status to one based more on leisure and consumption behaviours. This trend has made horses vulnerable to potentially harmful demands related to their performance and the achievement of human pleasure and economic rewards. Because horse-based sport and leisure activities have been institutionally recognised for their cultural value, they pose serious threats to horses and expose them to continuous direct or indirect and intentional or unintentional abuse. Regan (1986) suggests that humans must change their beliefs before they can change their habits, so horse handlers have to change their ideas and attitudes in order to improve how they treat horses. From posthumanism, it is thus necessary to rethink humans' subjectivities, practices and moral concerns. However, since attitude change is a complex process and sometimes difficult to achieve (Hogg & Vaughan, 2008), changing human behaviours towards horses is a hard educational, political, cultural and economic challenge to meet.

This study's findings have implications for proposed policies about animals' use and treatment in recreational events. Given that changes in cultural attitudes towards animals as sentient beings are difficult to make, regulations that guarantee horses are protected and treated well in these events are required to eliminate animal abuse more immediately. For event organisers and, more specifically, for equestrian activities, regulations must be designed that explicitly prohibit acts of direct physical and emotional equestrian abuse. The Mexican public sector needs to develop policies that prohibit owners from subjecting horses to long periods of work and using them in recreational and tourist activities, including punishing any type of abuse in work or leisure contexts.

The posthumanist ideal is that government and business policies should be established to recognise horses as sentient beings and entitled to dignified treatment without abuse and to avoid using these animals as an instrument to serve human recreational interests. Greater efforts are also required in the public and private recreational and tourism sectors to sensitise humans to how equestrian and animal abuse in general extends far beyond pain and bloodshed, contrary to what many horse owners and riders believe.

While posthumanist philosophies have gained greater acceptance and been applied in other sectors of the population, more academic support for policies is needed to guarantee horses are protected in all their current functions.

The present study's findings open up new research opportunities, particularly from a human-horse interaction perspective. As horse-based recreational activities gain greater popularity and significance, researchers need to explore further the social dimensions of these forms of leisure (Gilbert & Gillett, 2014). Thus, issues such as the subjective understanding of what horse abuse means to riders, owners and trainers suggest possible future directions for research. Exploring these humans' perceptions of horse abuse could facilitate a better understanding and explanation of their behaviour towards horses and, in turn, offer new ways to think about human-horse relations. Ethical approaches that question the validity of the use and death of animals in tourism and leisure activities are being more widely applied (Quintero Venegas & López López, 2018), but the possibility of making significant changes that dissolve basic human-horse dichotomies inherent in humanist thinking remains a distant ideal.

Declaration of interest:

None

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