

HUMAN–EQUINE TOURISM AND NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS: EXPLORING PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING THROUGH TRANSFORMATIONAL EXPERIENCES

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This article critically explores insights into human–equine touristic experiences and acknowledges how such interconnectivity underline nature-based solutions (NBS) to mutually enhance psychological well-being. Despite the growing interest in NBS limited accounts have explored human–animal relations within the realm of touristic encounters. Drawing upon multispecies ethnographic accounts, participant observations, diaries, and in-depth interviews were held with 21 participants, with topics themed around human–equine experiences, relational encounters, and well-being. The sample was taken from participants located in the North East of England who engaged in equestrian tourism. Findings revealed life-changing transformations as a result of multispecies encounters. Deep emotional elements were experienced through intersubjectivity where participants spoke of the psychological benefits of being immersed in natural landscapes with their equine companions. This article demonstrates human–equine experiences as a positive NBS and illustrates that for the two species to effectively interact in equine-assisted psychological interventions requires mutual trust, empathy, and effective communication.

KEYWORDS: *multispecies experiences; equine-assisted interventions posthumanism; transformation; psychological well-being; nature-based solutions, NBS*

INTRODUCTION

“Given the ubiquitous involvement of animals in our everyday lives, it is not surprising that they inhabit tourism spaces and experiences in equally diverse arrangements” (Markwell, 2015, p. 1). As a result, animals contribute to tourism in various ways, as Markwell (2015) describes as attractions in their own right,

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which may include being alive or dead, wild or captive; as a form of transportation; symbolically as destination icons; as travel companions; and as part of regional cuisine. It can be argued as above that indeed animals or nonhumans, intersect and interconnect with tourists and tourism in myriad ways. Increased leisure time, advances in technology, education, and the values associated with well-being within society has enabled various animals to be incorporated into a range of leisure and tourism landscapes, encouraging humans to interact and form relationships with nonhumans among diverse spaces (Carr, 2015; Danby, 2018; Danby & Hannam, 2016; Dashper, 2015; Evans & Vial, 2015; Franklin, 1999; Markwell, 2015).

Previously human–animal relations have focused around human consumption and utilization of animals for peoples' benefit; however, more recently, authors such as those indicated above, as well as Fox (2006), Bertella (2014), Davis and Maurstad (2016), Danby et al. (2019), Dashper (2019), Dashper and Brymer (2019) have begun to realize the significance of animals in their own right, as sentient beings, worthy of moral consideration. The shifting role of the horse in society is acknowledged by Dashper (2012, 2017) and more recently by the works of Dashper and Brymer (2019) and Sturød et al. (2019) indicating that once it was considered a vital partner to humans in terms of agriculture and warfare as well particularly with reference to transportation; however nowadays, the horse plays a predominant partner within sport, leisure, and tourism, and horses are becoming increasingly popular as companion and therapy animals (Wolframm et al., 2013). Changing economies, societies, and technologies have transformed the predominant roles held in human life (Evans & Vial, 2015). This new role includes emotional value, reflected in both the perceived status of animals and the importance of roles they take on in human–animal interaction, which includes animal-assisted activities, interventions, and visitation programs (Graffoner et al., 2017).

This article begins by setting the contextual and theoretical underpinnings of human–animal interactions as a nature-based solution (NBS), by demonstrating how the touristic landscape acts as a mediator to facilitate multispecies interconnectivity and associated encounters for mutual well-being. Previously, much research surrounding human–animal interactions and experiences of tourists encountering animals has accumulated around wildlife tourism (Ballantyne et al., 2011; Newsome et al., 2005) and the display of captive animals within tourist attractions (Markwell, 2015). Research within this study is more specifically linked to domestic animals, where accounts within the leisure and tourism environment remain more scarce (Young & Carr, 2018). The specific focus on horses is evident within this article, due to the fact that throughout history they have proven to have had varied roles within society. In contemporary society, the horse is a significant actor within the leisure, tourism, and events landscape, acting as a NBS, the result being a companion and a substitute for family members; furthermore, they contribute immensely toward emotional recreation (Danby et al., 2019; Kline et al., 2015; Notzke, 2019) although the body of work

is beginning to formulate (Buchmann, 2017; Danby, 2018; Danby & Hannam, 2016; Dashper, 2015, 2017, 2019; Dashper & Brymer, 2019; Gilbert & Gillett, 2014; Pickel-Chavalier, 2015; Notzke, 2019; Sturød et al., 2019).

Within this article, our research question critically explores how multispecies touristic encounters that include horses fundamentally contribute toward enhancing mutual well-being and mental health. Previously green spaces in hotels as NBS were determined as being positive for well-being and mental health (Han et al., 2020). Our objective here is to demonstrate how human–equine travel experiences as an NBS along with associated interactions seeks to illustrate how the natural landscape provides an experiential platform whereby humans and horses interact for mutual well-being. This study demonstrates how tourism acts as a significant mediator in NBS, allowing humans and horses to interconnect in nature-based landscapes to experience mutual well-being encounters. This article draws on what Gilbert and Gillett (2014) refer to as the complex interrelationship between humans and their horses enacted through equestrian travel.

Horses are one of the most versatile species integrated into human society. For centuries they have been an object of art and an invaluable means of transport. They have been described as one of the strongest and most graceful domesticated animals. Their role as companion and farm animals has expanded and humans have used them in sports and as working animals, in horse-assisted therapy and as police and military support. This versatility is the main reason why they have been successfully integrated into leisure and tourism processes. Sturød et al. (2019) acknowledge the declining number of work horses, while arguing that horse breeds that contribute toward a role in recreation have a stronger position in what Evans and Vial (2015) have termed *the new equine economy* and needless to say, they have ultimately become a significant actor in the touristic experience, hence, why they are an integral part of this study and as Bertella (2014) argues, such animal-based tourism experiences can be viewed as particularly complex and meaningful NBS.

Human–equine experiences involve “emotional recreation” as they involve varying levels of intellectual, physical, and spiritual stimulation from their experiences (Danby, 2013) as the findings of this article unveil. Such findings demonstrate the complex entanglements of human–equine relations that have been integrated and developed through their associations within tourism natural spaces, while illustrating how human–equine interactions are increasingly enabling cultural experiences and exotic travel opportunities (Bertella, 2014).

It becomes evident within this article that to define human–equine experiences as a positive NBS, and for the two species to effectively interact in equine-assisted psychological interventions and activities, requires trust, empathy, and effective communication from both the human and the horse.

Other animal species, most often dogs, have been used within the therapeutic and human well-being context (Grajfoner, 2012). The results of such studies show increased well-being, sense of happiness, and decreased levels of anxiety and stress (Grajfoner et al., 2017). This psychological well-being aspect of

human interaction with horses, given their versatility, is a strong component of the touristic experience and NBS, which this study fundamentally explores. The inclusion of horses in NBS, significantly increases the perception of well-being and self-rated mental health (Han et al., 2020). Although NBS, like green spaces and elements of natural environment have been investigated in the context of stress-related mental rehabilitation (Pálsdóttir et al., 2018), animals have rarely been included.

Animal relationships mean much more to their humans than mere equipment, status symbols, or a means to avocation (Hirschmann, 1994). This research, as well as the study by Keaveney (2008) confirms that animal consumption experiences can be seen as deep, involved, and emotional experiences within the company of highly valued companions (Holbrook et al., 2001). In this article, we attempt to illustrate how human–equine encounters as an interspecies communication system forms an interactional context in which emotional experiences are to be understood (Servais, 2005) within the tourism NBS landscape. Within the article, a posthumanistic approach toward human–animal relations aims to explore innovative ways of being in a postmodern society (Danby, 2018) relating to what Wilbert (2009) refers to as the human–animal divide from one of oppositionalism dualism into networks of intricate dependencies focused around kinship. Urbanik and Morgan (2013) reiterate that pet keeping transcends the boundaries of human–animal relationships to acknowledge a “more-than-human” “other.” Furthermore, this article unveils that human–equine touristic experiences are embedded in powerful emotions and mutual relations whereby as Bowes et al. (2015) argue, trans-species bonds are driven by various factors, including affection, companionship, and kinship that all promote wide-ranging mutual benefits.

POSTHUMANIST APPROACH TO HUMAN–ANIMAL RELATIONS

Various theoretical approaches link to a rethinking of the focus on human-centeredness and the complexities associated with humans and animals (Danby et al., 2019; Dashper, 2019; Fox, 2006; Philo & Wilbert, 2000). Posthumanist theory challenges the singular focus of human subjects and blurs boundaries between the human and nonhuman. Actor network theory has been influential to more-than-human theories, and indeed this study, as it refuses to see animals (and humans) as centered preexisting beings, refusing to see a distinction of separate worlds regarding humans and animals as well as nature and culture (Lorimer, 2009).

Crouch (2010) examines ways through which lives and spaces interact over time where individuals’ lives may be changed or influenced by various encounters. Birke (2007) argues that careful consideration needs to be given to the linkages between animals and the wider environment, particularly with humans and our treatment of nonhumans and the natural world. Birke (2007, p. 307) articulates that “‘nature’ is not something out there, rather it is something that we along with many others create.” Thrift (2004) relates to emotion, arguing that

feeling is not entirely individual instead it is something that emerges between bodies, whether human or otherwise. Reflecting on these notions, Game and Metcalfe (2011), Davis and Maurstad (2016), and Daspher (2019) similarly acknowledge that emotions may not only come from the subject but also from the living space, through an understanding of experiences of interconnectedness. The earlier work of Game (2001) explores the interconnectedness between humans and animals, with a particular interest on horses, where she questions humanist assumptions revealing this blurring of human–nonhuman boundaries and describes various ways of being involved in experiences, interactions, and associated connections surrounding the spatial and temporal qualities of lived spaces with nonhumans, proposing that through such interspecies connections, we are already part-horse, and horses, part-human. Furthermore, often, people who live in close contact with domesticated animals tend to view them from the perspective of both their animality and also their individual subjectivity (Bertella, 2014). Davis and Maurstad (2016) emphasize the agency of the horse and a need to move beyond anthropocentric studies to allow a more co-being, biosocial theoretical approach toward nature, cultures, and associated encounters, which is evident within the equine adventure travel encounters. These encounters, framed as nature exposure or NBS, have received a growing interest in psychology, especially in promoting positive mental health, which is detailed later in this study (Barnes et al., 2019).

INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND HUMAN–ANIMAL INTERACTIONS

In intersubjective terms the social world is not an object; it is a between world generated through the interactions of its members (Schutz, 1967). This sociological definition of intersubjectivity is based on shared social resources, common sense knowledge, and the individual's location among other situated embodied beings, animal, and human (Sanders & Arluke, 1993). Social behavior is reciprocated as both parties are oriented toward each other. For the reciprocity of perspectives to be successful a collective sense-making process, based on common-sense knowledge, is essential. Animals are equally involved in this process, as we will see from the examples below. Therefore, animals must have the ability to construe and hypothesize about the behavior of other animals and humans.

Shapiro (1990) reports a case study based on prolonged interactions between a dog and a human, defining the dog as a body-subject with intentional behaviors. The outcome implies a mutual understanding between the human and the dog, based on body movements, initiated and directed by both interactors. This mutual understanding through body movements is labeled “kinaesthetic empathy” (Shapiro, 1990, p. 193). Shapiro describes social construction as a set of social beliefs and attitudes (p. 193) which include both human and nonhuman animals alike. The study reports mutual assessment of behavior and personality between the dog and the human. Humans do not interact with animals as objects,

but as subjects and vice versa. Consequently, an animal will establish a different intersubjective space with a different person (Hearne, 1994, 1995; Sanders, 1992). Using the same analogy, different animals will display their own style of behavior with a person and consequently will create different styles of interaction (Wemelsfelder et al., 2000). Animal attentional styles are defined as ways animals pay attention to an interactive situation. Animals are actively engaged in interactions and cocreate their dynamics. These styles can be denominated as “enthusiasm,” “fear,” and so on. Relationships between humans and dogs and between humans and horses differ in important ways that reflect the different ways in which we live, communicate, and interact with different species and with different individual animals (Danby et al., 2019). Research particularly within the leisure and tourism landscapes, incorporates horses and dogs as they offer opportunities for humans to encounter rewarding (yet sometimes challenging) interspecies encounters (Danby et al., 2019).

Condition for successful interactions and mutual recognition of the meaning of behavior are common-sense knowledge and a shared semiotic system. Knowing the species and individual animals may increase the accuracy of assessment, prediction of behavior, and consequently well-being. In human–animal interaction this goes both ways. In animals as well as humans, common sense knowledge and a shared semiotic system influence the experience of an interaction, and therefore, affect the anticipations. This process involves an integration of the totality of an animal and a human as individuals therefore it is a holistic rather than a fragmented act.

Human–Horse Relations Within Tourism Landscapes

Tourism offers humans an opportunity to see and interact with diverse species on a global stage, that we would not usually encounter and often in their own natural environments (Danby et al., 2019). Equestrian tourism has seen limited scholarship, even though as Notzke (2019) argues that the segment has recently undergone significant growth in terms of supply and demand. Their work focuses specifically on equestrian tourism, traveling on horseback and explores the role of animal agency in the cocreation of touristic experiences and tourism places. Their article is illustrative of how horses are subjective actants and active partners providing psychological enrichment (Notzke, 2019). Horse-based tourism can be associated with a diverse array of activities. For example, as Ollenburg (2005) asserts us to the fact that horse-based tourism ranges from races and shows where the tourist is passive to active recreation where the tourist is a rider, traveling by horse on longer rides or shorter rides, it can be urban or rural, adventurous or sedentary.

Being outdoors, enjoying nature, and getting away from everyday strains and stresses are becoming increasingly important to many people (Sigurðardóttir, 2018). Sigurðardóttir’s work demonstrates the wellness and adventure conceptualization associated with equestrian tourism that concludes with a rethinking

of such connectivity. Human–equine leisure/tourism practices and associated experiences can provide hedonistic activities and assist with the emergence and development of meaningful relationships (Danby et al., 2019). “Equiscapes” provide a leisure landscape through which various human–equine activities and relations are formed, where boundaries become blurred (Danby, 2018; Finkel & Danby, 2019; Linghede, 2019). Equestrianism requires high levels of commitment, including time, emotion, and financial input, and so often becomes an important marker of individual and collective identity (Dashper, 2017; Dashper et al., 2019). Dashper (2019) argues that our leisure lives are often richer because of nonhuman animals, who play, relax, compete and work with and for us as a result of more-than-human encounters within a multispecies world.

METHOD

A multispecies ethnographic and posthumanistic approach was undertaken toward human–equine relational well-being within tourism. Interactional interpretative encounters were considered appropriate, to enable an empirical, innovative focus whereby the world is constituted of multiple realities. Data were collected including individual in-depth formal semi-structured interviews and individual personal diaries. Semi-structured interviews consisted of 21 female participants and the individual personal diary sample consisted of 15 female respondents. There was no particular reason for this gender significance, other than that the majority of participants who engaged in riding activities and associated tourism at a local livery yard and riding school in County Durham where the research was conducted were indeed women. Participants varied in age groups, ranging from 18 to 60 years.

Respondents varied from horse-owners and non-horse-owners along with professionals working in the equine industry. Participants individually spoke or wrote about their interactions, emotions, and nature-based encounters while engaging in human–equine tourism. Participants regularly interacted with horses and participated in a variety of equestrian tourism activities including equine holidays and short stays, *hacks* (a term used for riding out in the local area, often open countryside) as well as attending equestrian-related events such as horse-related shows or 3-day horse events. Participants were encouraged to talk or write about their interactive experiences and associated emotions with horses in natural touristic spaces. The interviews were held in a quiet, yet public space, which was the café, within a local riding school or externally at individual horse-owners’ premises. Individual interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and a dictaphone was used to record the data provided by each respondent. Interviews were scheduled over a 6-week period over the summer months, as the majority of respondents engaged in frequent riding activities and associated equestrian tourism. Interviews were conducted with five horse-owners, five non-horse-owners and five instructors within Pockerley Riding School as well as one external instructor, four external owners, and one external non-horse-owner in the wider

North East of England region who were not associated with Pockerley Riding School. A small minority of the respondents at Pockerley knew each other and were part of the same weekly riding group; however, others were not.

Personal diaries were used by participants within their own environment who kept a log of their daily interactions, experiences, and feelings surrounding human–equine nature-based encounters over an 8-week period. Once transcribed, interview and diary data were prepared and coded which assisted with the identification of emerging themes surrounding emotional encounters, travel experiences, and human–equine encounters. Diary respondents remained anonymous to encourage a more open spoken dialogue. Names of interview respondents and horses' names were changed to ensure anonymity throughout the discussion.

To ensure the credibility of the research data, and as an element of good practice, the interviews were conducted in an objective manner so that personal views as well as experiences of the researcher did not taint the data, enabling confirmability of the data presented. After each interview, an account of the research data and what was said to the researcher during the interviews were relayed back to the respondents to confirm that the information collected had been correctly understood and interpreted representative accounts of their social world within the context that was intended and to ensure that there was no bias from the researcher. These respondent validations have been particularly effective to ensure that there was accurate correspondence between the findings and individual personal perspectives surrounding human–equine emotional relations and associated touristic encounters. Due to the intense study of the small group of study participants, the individuals within the group typically shared common interests and experiences surrounding human–equine experiences providing in-depth accounts and the transferability of human–equine interactions within touristic spaces between horse-owners who had an individual connection with a horse or nonowners and professionals who had associations with a variety of horses and in particular the professionals who had a plethora of horse-related experiences. Throughout the research process, the researcher kept a complete record of all the phases of the research project, the interview transcripts, participants details, diary data, analysis notes, and so on in an accessible manner to ensure that protocols were adhered to at all times should audits wish to have been conducted. The range of age groups and experiences of the participants associated with the research, allowed a fair representation of the individual stakeholder viewpoints based on their individual relationships with horses which assisted in providing authentic accounts of relationships and associated experiences among the participants and horses.

FINDINGS

While different NBS have received increased attention in the context of improving human well-being and mental health, the role of animals as NBS has

remained mostly unexplored. Interactive time with horses provide opportunities for humans to experience the personal traits of the animal and enables a construction of knowledge of unique episodes that become an interchange of intimacy through feelings and experiences (Servais, 2005) and consequently a unique interactive form of NBS for both humans and horses. The participants were asked to reflect on their encounters with horses. The majority of participants had substantial experiences and engaged in various equine-travel-related activities, depending on the age of the participant these ranged from approximately 6 to 47 years.

It was interesting to see that the majority of participants had some experience with horses as a young child and their involvement with horses continued into adulthood where the horse remained focus and played a major role in their lives. For other participants they discussed that they had experienced horses from a young age, and due to various other stages and commitments in their lives, that is, growing up, marriage, parenthood, and so on, they had a break from engaging in horse-related activities and then later in life, they took up equine activities once again, stating that it was something that they always had interest, which they described as a “bug” within them which had never left. After reflecting on their lived human–equine experiences the following themes emerged from the participants’ statements which unravel the kinds of human–equine experiences encountered within natural landscapes.

Psychological Well-Being

Human–equine touristic and recreational experiences are arguably an essential part of NBS, an intangible activity, providing interaction and the opportunity to develop well-being, resilience and improving mental health (Han et al., 2020). It provides a unique form of NBS, where an active mutually agreed relationship between humans and nonhumans is formed within natural spaces. Human–equine experiences involve “emotional” recreation as humans and horses are able to gain intellectual, physical, and spiritual stimulation from their experiences (Danby, 2013).

Arnould and Price (1993) illustrate that hedonistic experiences are usually associated with intense, positive, intrinsically enjoyable experiences. Riders rely on their bodies as a site for transacting information, ideas, emotions, and knowledge to horses; as humans and horses do not share a symbolic language, they both use their bodies as a basis for iconic transaction (Brandt, 2004, cited in Danby & Hannam, 2016). Participants simultaneously spoke openly about how horses have strongly influenced and transformed their lives through such intersubjectivity:

I’ve had a very happy life with horses and if it hadn’t been for the horses I couldn’t imagine I’d be the person I am today. It’s made me a more confident person. It’s built my confidence and built my esteem, built my ability to communicate

and opens up a whole new world as well. (Jane, age 55 years, instructor and horse-owner)

Jane acknowledges improved mental health and well-being experiences gained as a result of human–equine interactions. She expresses how she has positively developed as a person as result of such multispecies encounters which exemplifies the intrinsic positive mental health contributors toward her individual well-being.

Keaveney (2008) argues that consumers of horse experiences dedicate time away from everyday life to participate and go to a special place to engage in the activity such as a riding facility. She highlights that significant psychotemporal sacrifices are required acknowledging that looking after a horse is a huge responsibility, which in turn transforms individual lifestyles and seriously affects individual leisure time (Dashper, 2019) as is evident within the transcripts throughout this section.

The impact of animals, including horses, on human psychological well-being is reported in numerous case studies (Crossman, 2016; Grajfoner et al., 2017). Recently, empirical research such as this, has attempted to explore the experiences that Jane describes through interactions with horses. The benefits of human–animal interaction within both therapeutic (animal-assisted interventions [AAI]), and nontherapeutic contexts (animal-assisted activities [AAA] and pet ownership [PO]) are supported by empirical data, which have shown a great deal of early promise to benefit psychological well-being through relaxation, destressing, and the therapeutic role of horses (Fine, 2010). All participants in the study reported how crucial horses are in sustaining or regaining psychological well-being and resilience through equine-assisted tourism experiences. It became obvious, that tourism acts as platform to immerse in nature, therefore, participants commonly referred to how the horse acts as a mediator within NBS through intimate emotional connection. Jane described how she experiences relaxation through human–horse interactions. It becomes apparent throughout this study how human–equine experiences enhance mutual psychological well-being and physical health.

Jane and Penelope’s statements below illustrate the need to escape from the stresses of work commitments and in everyday life responsibilities acknowledging that being with horses and spending time with them is crucial to alleviate stress and to enhance well-being (Dashper, 2019) much to the bemusement of others as is evident below:

When I’m working I’m out everyday all day so I think that that’s good in itself and you physically feel fit and I’ll just tell you, this is how I feel, it’s the only way I can describe it. When I was teaching at school, I used to sometimes think I’d finish work and I’d had a stressful day and I had a lot to do when I got home and I used to think I can’t physically do it, I don’t feel capable of driving up to the farm and I used to say ‘No go, you must go’ so I’d drive up here and I’d get my horse, tack

him up, groom and brush him and the minute I got into the Forges (woods) that was it, work was gone and riding back to the stables work was finished it was gone and it almost felt like a holiday, that's what it's meant to me it's helped me to survive. (Jane, age 55 years, instructor and horse-owner)

Sturød et al. (2019) acknowledge that horse trekking is frequently promoted in tourism as an authentic way of experiencing nature-based destinations. The following participant similarly reflects on the therapeutic and well-being benefits associated with regular human–equine multispecies encounters:

When I was working and riding, for me, they were a sort of therapy that I had because my work was associated with therapy, so I needed something that lifted me out of. . .umm. . .that intense. . .umm. . .form of concentration and I found that the riding meant that I had to really focus upon what I was doing. I took it seriously and it meant that I couldn't think of anything else so for me it wasn't merely recreational it had a real therapeutic value for me, I felt much calmer . . . umm . . . much more at ease with myself when I was riding and after I had ridden everything else had gone and all my worries had disappeared therefore it had a real strong therapeutic value for me. (Penelope, age 59 years, horse-owner)

The works of Hallberg (2008) and Romaniuk et al. (2018) commonly refer to the therapeutic value of human interactions with horses. Dashper (2017, p. 30) highlights the changes in human–horse relations within Western societies illustrating that horses have to a great extent become “subjects” with distinct personalities. The “animal turn” has led to substantial changes and negotiation of the human–horse relationship (Cassidy, 2009), a recurring theme identified within this article, and particularly, in reference to the comment made by Penelope below. As a result of the theoretical shift and considerations associated with the “animal turn” humans are now considering the valuable role that horses as significant “actors” contribute toward human–horse relations. Many participants spoke of the mutual trust which is evident within a strong human–equine relationship acknowledging the fact that respect and trust is required from both the human and the horse which reinforces the balance of equality between the two species. Appreciating the horse in its own right—horse welfare and NBS, reinforce post-humanistic argument. This form of dual emotion is derived through an understanding and an appreciation of positive human–equine interconnectedness, interactions and experiences between both actors as is evident below:

I know when he needs assurance and I know when he needs to be left alone as well. Mostly I know when he needs to be left alone and I let him get on and do his job and then he says “Did I do that ok?” I say “Yes we did that really well” so it's a two way street. (Penelope, age 59 years, horse-owner)

In Penelope's statement she recognizes the importance of partnership working with her horse (Dashper, 2017). This unique form of NBS insists in formulating interconnectivity and mutual respect in building interspecies well-being, respect, and trust. Penelope trusts her horse to do his job and lets him get on; however, she also mentions that she knows when he needs reassurance and is able to give that to him. Therefore, as with the statement above she realizes that mutual trust and respect is a two-way process, which reaffirms the "animal turn" approach to human–animal interactions and negotiative behavior between human–horse encounters as Cassidy (2009) refers to.

The following participants expressed a conscious use of their senses as part of the human–equine experience. Hubbard (2005) illustrates that the body is a fundamental communication device and interface toward the world explaining that people register and act upon their environment through their senses. Bondi et al. (2005) discuss that embodied ontology of human experience entails that emotions are effects of transactions between people, places, and things. Sensory experiences are immediate, powerful, and capable of transforming lives profoundly (Gobé, 2001). Quan and Wang (2004) also argue that sensory experiences can be supporting and central to the overall experience. The following participants commented on the sight of the horse as well as the sounds and smells that are encountered through human–equine interactions, which participants demonstrated are sensory aspects that contribute to the novelty and authenticity of the nature-based experience.

I enjoy everything about riding—the smell, the connection that you have when you ride, the trust and respect which builds a bond. (Anonymous diary extract)

When riding a horse, people see nature differently, their human consciousness alters, by having a different psychological perspective, they are not outside looking at nature, they are a part of it (Toth, 2000). When riding a horse you become at one with nature, not moving against it through which Toth (2000) reveals that people become part of and attuned to a multitude of natural sensory stimuli, which is what Jade refers to below, acknowledging embodied encounters between humans and horses as a result of "becoming" together through riding activity:

They're so big and powerful but think . . . when you're on them . . . it's the feeling you get when you're on them galloping through green open spaces. (Jade, age 21 years, horse-owner)

Nature-Based Adventure Solutions

People are dependent on natural areas to fulfil physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual needs (Weber & Anderson, 2010). Various authors suggest that access to nature is valued and considered important to societies' health as a

whole (Danby, 2013; Katcher & Beck, 1987; Maller et al., 2006; Stilgoe, 2001). Within this study, it can be argued as well as the human–horse interaction, the benefits of being outdoors in the countryside are seen as significant contributors toward the pleasurable experiences, and therefore, act as an NBS toward multi-species well-being. It can be argued within this article that the natural environment or space that the interaction or activity takes place, complements and contributes to the actual human–equine interconnectedness. Participants emphasized this (see next section) when they talk of themselves and their horses being immersed and connected with nature when riding. It is this spiritual and emotional awareness that becomes evident in the following statements:

It's nice to be out and about in the fresh air, an excellent way to see the countryside.
(Beth, age 30 years, horse-owner)

Sharpley and Jepson illustrate that people often have spiritual experiences. They discuss that

Spirituality may be thought of as a connection between the “self” and “this world” implying that a spiritual or emotional relationship exists or is sought between people, “this world” and specific places, such as the countryside, within it.
(Sharpley & Jepson, 2011, p. 55)

Some participants acknowledged that different environments may influence different interactions with horses. The statement below illustrates that a trek (a ride out in the countryside) can be a totally different experience to a lesson or flat work (exercising the horse within a familiar enclosed arena) indicating that the horses have a different perspective in a new or different environment, they are aware that the horses may be more energetic or eager to do what you ask them to do when they are in the open space, indicating that they themselves may experience a sense of freedom in certain environments. The following transcripts are illustrative of the sharing of lived spaces and natural encounters derived through human–horse relations:

A hack is a totally different experience than going around the arena. The horses enjoy themselves out in the open they are always ready to trot and canter when they can. Riding in the woods is so scenic and peaceful. (Anonymous diary extract)

An appreciation of the landscape and the tranquility of nature were commonly referred to by participants when relating to their human–equine experiences. Enjoying the natural scenery, the sounds and smells of nature, getting away from the usual demands and routines of life, and experiencing tranquility and solitude were important to participants within this study. They described the natural environment as a mediator through which multispecies could interconnect and develop meaningful relations.

It's lovely to sort of see new areas and ride different paths and things . . . umm . . . it can be a little bit you know, you've got to be a bit more careful cos the horse is in a new place, a new environment. Going out on the hack it's a little bit more exciting for the horse and you but I think it does the horse good to have a little change. (Jane, age 55 years, instructor and horse-owner)

Experiencing natural places provides an opportunity for tourists to engage with the environment not only on a physical level but also at a deeper emotional level which can also contribute to their enjoyment of their activities (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011).

Participants spoke of the increased importance of visual consumption, or their “aesthetic” judgment of the countryside and the environment. This article is illustrative of the posthumanistic accounts, inclusive of the mutual benefits of these to horses also.

Adventure travel has grown significantly in recent years (Evans & Vial, 2015; Sigurðardóttir & Helgadóttir, 2015; Sturød et al., 2019). It can be argued that it has become a major niche within the special interest tourism market sector and a fundamental part of the tourist experience. Adventure travel has been defined by Millington et al. (2001) as

A leisure activity that takes place in an unusual, exotic, remote or wilderness destination. (p. 67)

It can be argued that adventure travelers expect to experience varying levels of risk, excitement, and tranquility and be personally challenged (Millington et al., 2001).

Horse-based adventure tourism products are similar to other types of adventure tourism according to Ollenburg (2006); however, she argues one critical difference: *the horse*, explaining that horses are animals not equipment, therefore, tour guides and other staff members need to have the relevant skills in order to train, ride, and manage the horses as well as managing their tour clients and the interaction between the two.

Many participants within this study purposefully traveled away from their home in order to consume equine adventure products. The riding experiences discussed below are evident of both domestic and international travel. It is important to note that the sense of place also played an exuberant role toward mutual well-being within these multispecies encounters:

The one that springs to mind is the Lake District where we went with neighbours and we did a shuttle service three journeys up and down in the horse box with a load of horses, we stayed in accommodation in the Lake District and rode our horses there . . . umm . . . I have done Hamsterley Forest, that's another place and Kielder. It was a mixture of the two we took our horses quite a few years ago and went for about four nights, stabled them up there and hacked around both Kielder

and Hamsterley Forest. I absolutely adored it, the horses loved it. It's great for them to have a change. (Belinda, age 60 years, horse-owner)

Belinda acknowledges the significance of traveling to unfamiliar places with horses which reinforces the posthumanistic approach to human–equine relations holding the view that it is good for horses' welfare to have a change of routine and scenery. Both Beth and Witney below reflected on their experiences of a riding holiday in France, which they traveled together and compared their experiences of riding within the United Kingdom:

It was a completely different experience to what I'm used to because we did a lot of riding, we did a lot of in the saddle probably between two and four hours per day. We did a lot of . . . umm . . . flat work. We did a lot of schooling which I enjoyed and then we hacked on the afternoon. Obviously they treat their animals as. . . umm. . . you know they are there to do a job rather than . . . umm . . . for pleasure . . . umm . . . but I thoroughly enjoyed it. (Beth, age 30 years, horse-owner)

In relation to some horse-related tourism experiences, Ollenburg (2006) explains that small groups may ride for many hours per day and clients usually have substantial prior experience, good riding skills, and good fitness, stamina, and endurance. Within Beth's discourse, she spoke of the many hours of riding and elaborated on the involvement of lots of flat work, which is intricate of the transformative learning element and the development of skills that were also being experienced as a result of these multispecies NBS.

Beth was also asked about the style of riding and the associated culture in France in comparison with the United Kingdom. She responded,

It was pretty similar although they were . . . umm . . . much more stricter about how they ask a horse to perform and the level of expectations of what they expect from maybe not so much from the horse but from the rider whereas we might take things a little slower with a novice rider they are straight in at the deep end expecting you to develop your riding skills much quicker than maybe what we would expect here in the UK.

It is evident from Beth's statement that in France, the culture associated with the "horse people" was a lot firmer in how they asked the horses to perform and there was a higher level of expectation of the rider, encouraging them to learn riding skills at a much faster pace than here in the United Kingdom. Witney below, describes how they paired up riders with horses based on their individual capabilities at the start of the trip:

It was in the middle of France it was in . . . umm . . . a place near Albany, Toulouse was the airport . . . umm . . . and we went there for a week and had quite intensive lessons. It was riding twice a day that was quite intensive lessons . . . umm . . . but

you could have picked and chosen what you did want to do but they did think safety so you did have to prove your ability before they would let you out on the horses or even match you up with a suitable horse before they set you away on a lesson. (Witney, age 47 years, horse-owner)

It is evident from Witney's statement that the French were proficient in safety by asking riders to demonstrate their abilities before matching them with a horse with appropriate personality traits (Grajfoner et al., 2010) which implies their commitment to health and safety regulations and the welfare of the horse. Witney describes her experience surrounding the lessons as being quite intense. Witney was asked to describe her experience of riding other horses as opposed to her own. She responded,

Riding somebody else's horse in that respect . . . umm . . . and having the intensive lessons, what it does is it knocks you up another notch again it makes you . . . umm . . . focus again cos your own horse when you've had him for ten years like I've said before he's like a "comfy pair of slippers" so riding another horse you know you had to work hard and you had to do it properly . . . umm . . . but it was very good. It was very exhilarating in that respect . . . umm . . . I came back from there thinking yes, I was like powered up and you know we're gonna do this we're gonna do that but so far as the place was concerned . . . umm . . . it made me appreciate what we had over here cos it was really beautiful there but living where I live, I live in a semi-rural location and it was very on par on what I've got on my own doorstep . . . umm . . . I'm very lucky in that respect and it was, very similar you know. I've got tracks and woodlands and all sorts of rides through . . . umm . . . and the time of year that I went it was . . . umm . . . mid May so France was still very green and it wasn't that hot so it was very similar to what we do have around here.

In Witney's statement she refers to her experience of riding another horse as challenging in comparison to her own who she feels familiar and more confident with, which affirms the trust and close-bonded relationship she has formed with her own horse. She mentioned how the intensive lessons challenged her ability and improved her skills, whereas at home riding her own horse she would be more relaxed. Interestingly Witney compares the landscape in France where she rode with her own landscape acknowledging the similarity, very green, with tracks and woodland nearby. Through visual consumption and aesthetic judgment, the landscape in France was quite nostalgic to Witney as it reminded her and made her more appreciative of what she had at home. Reid (2013) argues that horse trekking is promoted in tourism as the most authentic way of experiencing destinations. Urry (1995) previously reminded us that almost all places are "toured" stating that the pleasures of place derive partly from the emotions involved with visual consumption of place which is evident in Whitney's human–equine experience here:

Well I've been with "horse friends" to Wales that was a few years ago . . . umm . . . I've been to Portugal twice but to different places . . . umm . . . and both these were dressage related holidays and last year we went to Spain and that was also a dressage holiday. (Joanne, age 51 years, horse-owner)

When Joanne was asked to describe her experiences on dressage-related riding holidays in Europe compared with the United Kingdom, she responded,

You generally get much better quality horses . . . umm . . . in Portugal and Spain and you get the opportunity to ride . . . umm . . . highly trained stallions . . . umm . . . that can do sort of grand prix movements whereas in this country, there's not really a lot of places that you can go that they can deliver that so you're limited really. It's the Portuguese . . . umm . . . classical dressage you know it's their speciality so although its not cheap . . . umm . . . if you had a similar holiday based in England you could probably bet it would be twice as expensive so it's better value. (Joanne, age 51 years, horse-owner)

Joanne discussed the quality standard associated with "dressage" horses in Spain and Portugal as opposed to the United Kingdom conveying that classical dressage is a specialty in Portugal, which indicates why they use highly trained stallions. Joanne acknowledged the cost associated with such encounters, indicating better value for money to travel to destinations such as Spain and Portugal to engage in such quality human–equine multispecies experiences as opposed to here in the United Kingdom. Horse-based tourism as an experience may refer to a rich cultural heritage associated with nostalgia (Helgadóttir, 2015), which is evident in the responses above.

Katie below, also describes her equine travel experiences in Spain:

The first riding holiday I went on was to a place near Seville in Spain . . . umm . . . so obviously they were all Andalusian horses and that's where I got my real passion for Andalusian horses. I've since been back three times to that place but I've taken girl friends with me cos Stephen wasn't bothered about going back to that particular place in Spain mainly because you were having lessons everyday and he just didn't want to do the lessons . . . umm . . . but for the girls, we loved it cos when I said about all these high movements, the horses were all schooled to do that so . . . umm . . . so it was amazing what we were doing but sadly I can't get my own horse to do that (laughs). (Katie, age 42 years, horse-owner)

In Katie's statement above she similarly discusses the quality standards of the horses in Spain, which coincides with Joanne's statement earlier, highlighting that the horses were well trained to perform high movements and generally perform well overall in comparison to the encounters she has with her own horses at home. Katie also acknowledges the regularity of riding lessons that were

encountered while in Spain, reinforcing the transformative learning element which was important to improve and practice her riding skills.

CONCLUSIONS

Successful encounters between humans and horses within the natural environment provided highly emotional and embodied touristic experiences along with influential well-being improvements, life-changing transformations, and learning enhancement, which all constitute fundamental principles of NBS within this study. Findings revealed the growing recognition of the posthumanistic approach toward human–equine interactions, the complex and dynamic ways in which Whatmore (2002) argued that people, organisms, technologies, and geophysical processes are woven together in the making of spaces and places. Holbrook et al. (2001) similarly discussed that people enjoy the satisfaction of communicating with another species, which promotes mental health and has an enlightened feeling of connection to wildlife and nature. Furthermore, it was this element of intersubjectivity and multispecies interconnectivity immersed within the diverse, natural landscapes, which participants valued as a form of NBS.

Human–equine multispecies encounters were seen as what Holbrook et al. (2001) referred to as deep involved experiences with the company of highly valued companions. Humans within this study spoke of a heightened sense of human–equine euphoria within their encounters whereby humans and horses were able to gain intellectual, physical, and spiritual stimulation from their entwined natural experiences. Findings revealed that positive human–equine encounters were dependent on the type of interactions, the emotions between both human and horse, as well as their relationship and the intersubjective natural spaces through which these encounters took place. An appreciation of different landscapes and cultures were acknowledged by participants that were consequential of multispecies adventure travel. Data revealed the complex entanglements of human–equine relations and associated experiences revealing that positive human–equine relations required trust, empathy, and effective cross-species communication for mutual psychological well-being.

This article has signified how the nonhumans are fundamental part of NBS to increase human well-being and mental health. They have become key actors within the human–equine touristic experience, and are worthy of moral consideration and play a fundamental role in humans' lives (Danby et al., 2019). The findings are testimony to the posthumanist approach to multispecies encounters, which decenters human subjectivity and recognizes that nonhumans do in fact positively influence our individual lives and have a significant ability to shape our tourism encounters and overall well-being.

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