

A group of people, including children and adults, standing in a line outdoors near a building, possibly a farm or equestrian center. The scene is bright and sunny, with shadows cast on the ground. The people are dressed in casual attire, and some are holding equipment. The background shows a large building with a gabled roof and trees.

More than '9 to 5': Thinking about horse *working* in the 21st Century

Rhys Evans
Hogskulen for landbruk og bygdeutvikling, Norway

Nina Ekholm Fry
Director, Equine Assisted Mental Health
Prescott College, Arizona, USA

“Arbeidshest”?

- “Arbeidshest” or ‘Work-horse’ is a Scandinavian term specifically used to describe horses that ‘pull things’, whether plows, sleighs, wagons or other implements/vehicles.
- In the U.S. the work-horse is often ridden and involved in cattle ranching activities.

Horse Work Has Changed...

- In UK, in 1920 - 1.1 million horses worked in agriculture;
- in 1980 - measured in the tens of thousands (G. Crossman)

- North America (2005)

Racing/Showing/Recreation –

7,470,408

Other -

1,752,439

“Other” activities include farm and ranch work, rodeo, carriage horses, polo, police work, informal competitions, etc.

(<http://www.horsecouncil.org/national-economic-impact-us-horse-industry>)

So Has Human Work...

- Economic and social change means that Service Sector employment now dominates economic activity in developed Economies.
- Increasingly, *human work* involves not industrial or agricultural production, but the servicing of human needs through interaction with clients with less physical engagement

So Has Human Work...

- In 2000:
 - 74 % of the US workforce was employed in services,
 - 71 % in the UK,
 - 71 % in France,
 - 62 % in Germany,
 - 72 % in the Netherlands
 - 63 % in Spain

(OECD, 2000).

Service Labour

- The service sector contains many interactive service jobs that involve high degrees of social interaction and the performance of emotional labor.
- *Emotional labor*, defined as the management of feeling to create a contextually appropriate emotional display, is ... an integral part of service sector jobs because of the intensely social aspects of these roles (Warton 1997).

21st Century Human Work Stressors

- Humans often need help to cope with the stresses of service sector employment.
- This work can have its own categories of stressors, from repetitive strain injuries acquired in front of computer screens, to the health impacts of constant levels of high stress

Stresses of Service Labour

- One key negative consequence of service labour is Emotional exhaustion.
 - Emotional exhaustion is a specific stress-related reaction and is considered to be a key component of the burnout process (Maslach, 1982).
 - Emotional exhaustion refers to a state of depleted energy caused by excessive emotional demands made on people interacting with customers or clients (Feldman & Morris 1997)

Defining Horse Work the 21st Century

- Humans have historically defined horse work as horses engaging in activities that are work for humans, such as farming, ranching or logging (humans and horses doing work together)
- The privately owned leisure horse has definite work parameters (perform on light rides in terrain, arena activities, and, perhaps, light competition) but are not considered working horses as no human work is involved.

Defining Horse Work the 21st Century

- New areas of equines performing services which are for leisurely or therapeutic purposes for humans – for the recipient of the service this is not work-related, but for provider of services it is.

Consequently, horses working in these areas should be considered working horses!

What is *Horse Work* in the 21st Century?

- This includes:
 - Riding as a stress-reducing leisure activity
 - Learning and competing in amateur competition
 - Tourism
 - Therapy
- The fields of including horses in learning, human growth, and therapy services (Equine Assisted Activities and Therapies (EAAT)) are growing significantly

What is *Horse Work* in the 21st Century?

- Our *leisure* is *work* for horses
- Our *learning* is *work* for horses
- Our *recuperation* and *rehabilitation* is *work* for horses
- Thus, we must redefine the working horse category in the 21st Century!

Equine Tourism

- Tourist horses engage in *work* with many strangers, regularly. Further, these strangers have varied levels of riding skills, riding styles and expectations.
- Tourist riders also have varied sizes and weights.
- Tourist horses must leave their usual paddock environment and move out to new environments.

Equine Tourism

This means that they:

- Are exposed to different communication systems (languages and cues)
 - Are removed from their usual social groups
 - Enter what may be unknown/unpredictable environments
- Thus, they may:
 - suffer physical stress from heavy riders, rough terrain
 - suffer social stresses and isolation from companions
 - encounter stress from not understanding commands, aids, expectations

Equine Tourism



- They may need:
 - Social reassurance and stability
 - Time spent with a regular rider to reinforce clear communication norms
 - Rest and recuperation from physical stresses

Equine Tourism

- Research in Iceland:
 - Owners of horse tourism businesses complain about breeders producing horses more appropriate for winning prizes than working.
 - A common strategy is to take up to 5 horses per rider and have riders change horse midday

Equine-assisted Activities and Therapies (EAAT)

- Horses involved in EAAT can be used in physical, occupational or speech therapy, as well as in psychotherapy (*equine-assisted therapy*) for humans
- And also in human development and learning services (*equine-assisted activities*) such as education, coaching and personal growth.

Each work area has its own challenges for the horse

Equine-assisted Activities and Therapies (EAAT)

- The EAAT horse is exposed to:
 - Inconsistent interactions with individuals who give unclear signals/cues
 - Physical impact of unstable riders and positions
- Also: emotional impact on the horse?
 - Human behaviors linked to feelings (mammalian interspecies interactions)
 - Smells
 - Tone of voice

Equine-assisted Activities and Therapies (EAAT)

- Ethical challenges:
 - EAAT practitioners are trained in ‘human’ fields but **may not have sufficient equine knowledge** (e.g. not able to recognize signs of stress in horse)
 - Stressful work environment for horse
 - Activities at expense of the horse (prolonged exposure to aversive client behaviors for the learning benefit of the client)
 - Horse and programming mismatch (horse and work role demands/scope incompatible)

Equine-assisted Activities and Therapies (EAAT)

Horses in therapy work need opportunities to:

Restore positive and clear human-horse interactions

- Human reinforcing cues/commands and expected behaviors with positive (controllable) outcomes for equine

Restore physical and psychological balance

- Opportunities for species-specific behaviors such as social interaction with other horses, unrestricted movement, frequent eating behaviors, choice of activities

What can be done?

- Engage in best physiological practice:
 - Nutrition, physiotherapy, natural exercise, health care plans
- Listen to/learn from ethology
 - Understanding species-specific behaviours and applying knowledge of welfare principles when keeping horses
- Treat horses as individual, sentient being with needs
- Understand and define scope of work for specific horse work roles (“professions”); assess horses for suitability and the need for additional training

Working horses in the 21st Century?

- A new challenge to *redefine* horse work
- A new challenge to *understand* our horses better
- A new challenge for *ethologists* to support better horse welfare and for this knowledge to be applied
- A new challenge to *breeders* to produce more suitable individuals for certain work roles
- A new challenge to those *working with horses* in new occupations to assure that their activities are treated like work!

Thank you!

- Rhys Evans: rhys@hlb.no
- Nina Ekholm Fry: nfry@prescott.edu
- Equine Research Network (EqRN)
 - www.eqrn.net
 - eqrnetwork@gmail.com