

“It’s not just about petting horses”: Understanding Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy and Horse-  
Human Healing Relationships

By

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## **Abstract**

This thesis critically analyses experiences of the horse-human relationship in equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP). As a therapeutic modality, EAP relies on the presence of a horse, a licensed psychotherapist, and a client. As the field is generally unregulated, each EAP session and practice is slightly different. Drawing on interview data conducted with 10 Ontario-based EAP clinicians, I offer two main arguments: First, I demonstrate that psychotherapists approach the horse-human relationship differently depending on how they understand the role of their horse in the EAP encounter. Clinicians often anthropomorphize, or assign human-like characteristics to their horses, as a way of respecting the work that they do in an EAP session. Other clinicians believed that EAP horses are ‘just horses,’ interacting with clients based on their evolutionary programming as prey animals. A select few psychotherapists blurred the species boundaries between horses and humans further, by likening their clients to their horses and effectively animalizing them in the process of comparison. I argue that this third approach has the most potential to help EAP clients, clinicians, and horses enter into respectful relationships that may allow for mutual flourishing. Second, I demonstrate the epistemological tensions at the heart of EAP practice. Because EAP may be considered a complementary or alternative medicine, clinicians often feel that they are not adequately recognized by the general public or by other healthcare professionals for the work they do and shared that they would like to see further professionalization of the field via training requirements and consistency in accreditation. While this alignment with biomedical legitimacy is welcomed by some, it may be incongruous with the holistic, client-centered, and sometimes spiritual components of EAP that sets it apart from traditional, biomedically recognized talk therapies. I argue that the spiritual element of EAP is at odds with the dominant Western scientific paradigm, which could be lost should EAP undergo

professionalization and further standardization and regulation. I conclude by offering several areas for further exploration and reflect on the challenge of centering animals in critical research when they are not directly present in data collection.

*Keywords:* equine-assisted psychotherapy, horse-human relationships, animal labour, professionalization, epistemology, spirituality

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
AAT	Animal Assisted Therapy
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous and People of Colour
CCPA	Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CRPO	College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario
CAMs	Complementary and Alternative Medicines
CAS	Critical Animal Studies
EAGALA	Equine Assisted Growth And Learning Association
EAL	Equine Assisted Learning
EFW	Equine Facilitated Wellness
EAP	Equine Assisted Psychotherapy
EAT	Equine Assisted Therapy
NHS	National Health Service
OHIP	Ontario Health Insurance Plan
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
RP	Registered Psychotherapist
RPQ	Registered Psychotherapist Qualifying
TAM	Tranquil Acres Method



## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Growing up, I spent many hours roaming the halls of my local hunter-jumper horse barn. I first started taking riding lessons when I was 10 years old, and I continued to learn and grow alongside my equine friends in the five years that followed. This time corresponded with a turbulent period of my life at home, and the refuge that I found at the barn made me appreciate the horses that I worked with for their honesty, patience, and compassion. I did not yet know that Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP), a type of Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT), was a clinical therapeutic intervention, but even in the context of leisure riding I was able to sense the therapeutic effect of the horses and the barn. Many equestrians would tell a similar story: the barn is their ‘happy place,’ a place to go when they need to unwind, de-stress, or check-out from the chaos of their everyday lives. Anita Maurstad, Dona Lee Davis and Sarah Dean (2015) detail this in their account of female equestrians in the United States and Norway who medicalize the physical, personal, social, and emotional benefits and pleasures they experience while riding horses, often referring to their horses as their therapists and the practice of riding as therapeutic. While I share the sentiments of these equestrians, I found myself wondering how they translate in clinical therapeutic environments. What is it about the horse-human relationship in EAP that makes the experience therapeutic? When I went to look at the literature, I found a lack of studies critically engaging with EAP; most focused on the experience of leisure riding or measuring the clinical outcomes of AAT interventions. With a few notable exceptions, these studies tended to maintain strict species boundaries between the horse and the human – I hope this project will make our mutual dependencies clearer.

Since the end of my previous riding lessons and the subsequent beginning of my graduate studies (and with a whole lot of inspiration from Donna Haraway's *When Species Meet*), I have spent a considerable amount of time thinking about my human and nonhuman relationships. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced me to reckon with my problematic understandings of nature and culture as discrete entities, and this realization has been prodded along and encouraged further by research assistantship work on COVID-19 and companion pets. I have been in the process of shifting my thinking from considering the social, political, and emotional worlds of human and nonhuman animals as distinct and contained spheres, albeit with the occasional intrusion or overlap, to an ontology that recognizes the interconnectedness of humans, nonhumans, and the myriad ways we impact each other. Recognizing the agency of nonhuman animals is a critical touchstone in most posthumanist and multispecies theories; to deny that humans impact horses, and horses impact humans, would be ignorant at best. After taking SOCY936 (Introduction to Critical Disability Studies) in the Fall of 2020 and being introduced to scholarly work on AAT and critical disability studies through Griet Roets and Rosi Braidotti's writing on Deleuzian becomings-with nonhuman service animals (2006), the 'animal question' has lingered in my thoughts. I realized I could interrogate this question further with the animal friends and companions of my youth – horses, or more specifically, the relationship cultivated between horses, equine-assisted psychotherapy clients, and their therapists. It was not until I began assisting my supervisor with a project on multispecies companionship that I acquired the language I needed to parse out my research interests. This was not the project I was originally planning on doing for my master's thesis; however, I felt compelled to 'return to the barn' and further investigate the horse-human relationships that defined my youth.

This project seeks to explore how equine-assisted psychotherapists understand their work and the role of their horses. It is one thing to claim horseback riding is therapeutic, typically as an auxiliary benefit in leisurely riding, but what happens to the horse, and horse-human interaction, in the practice of EAP? This project takes the horse-human relationship as its focus, with an attention to the power relations and questions of animal identity that structure the EAP encounter, as it is described by its human practitioners. As I will demonstrate in the literature review, there is a dearth of research investigating the horse-human relationship in EAP, and even less that adopts a posthumanist, multispecies studies perspective. I hope to address this gap and offer some theoretically informed critical perspectives on EAP by asking:

1. What is it about the human-horse relationship that is therapeutic?
2. What is it about the horse or ‘horsiness’ that makes the relationship therapeutic?
3. If the interests of the horse are considered alongside the human, what ethical questions are raised by EAP and how might they be addressed?

In this chapter, I introduce and define the practice of EAP before moving onto a general literature review intended to offer readers some context regarding the basic ideas of posthumanism, multispecies studies, critical animal studies and the state of the field in AATs. This literature review is not exhaustive, as Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 each have their own brief literature review specific to the analyses therein. After my literature review, I discuss my methods and the ethical decisions I made while writing this thesis, and I close with a brief outline of my thesis.

### **Background: An Overview of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy**

First, it is necessary to ensure that my readers have an adequate understanding of what EAP is. The task of defining EAP is a tricky one. Though the activity itself seems relatively

straightforward (i.e., the delivery of psychotherapy from a clinician registered with the College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario [CRPO] in the presence of a horse), the reality of what the psychotherapy session looks like from clinician to clinician, how it is different from other forms of equine facilitated wellness or healing activities, and the processes of certification and training vary greatly within the Ontario EAP landscape. Equine Facilitated Wellness (EFW) (Professional Association for Equine Facilitated Wellness, 2022), for example, can be practiced by a certified health professional, learning professional, or an equine professional, whereas Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) (Equine Assisted Learning Canada, 2022) can be practiced by equine assisted personal development coaches (though the criteria for this, beyond receiving formal training from EAL Canada, is unclear). Both EAL and EFW certification programs may result in the ability to offer “equine-assisted therapy” services, but EAP can only be offered by certified psychotherapists. Beyond the scope of life coaching, personal development, wellness coaching and experiential learning also lies the field of hippotherapy or equine-assisted physical therapy. Several EAP clinicians I spoke with made the distinction between EAP and Equine-Assisted Therapy (EAT) or equine-assisted physical therapy, which tends to be more focused on a physical rehabilitation process for those with physical health and mobility issues rather than mental health or wellness concerns. As a brief aside, I originally referred to equine-assisted psychotherapy as EAT, but due to the overlapping terminology that characterizes the field of EAT, and desires expressed by EAP clinicians during our interviews, I will be referring to equine-assisted psychotherapy as EAP moving forward.

There are many variations of EAP that clinicians may practice, which is largely the result of different training philosophies. The most popular approaches seem to be informed by the Equine Assisted Growth And Learning Association (EAGALA) model, the Tranquil Acres (TA)

Method, and the O.K. Corral Series. All these approaches require mental health professionals to receive at least three days of intensive training (more for the TA Method and EAGALA), and the TA Method and EAGALA require the mental health professional to work alongside an equine professional during the EAP session. That said, there is no governing body for EAP practitioners; effectively, any mental health professional who is certified by the CRPO and has access to a horse for therapy sessions may market themselves as an EAP professional and offer EAP sessions. This also means that there is no regulatory oversight as to how the horses who are a part of EAP must be treated – ultimately, the practice depends upon the individual clinician offering their services. If trained in a certain model, such as EAGALA, the TA Method, or O.K. Corral, clinicians may market themselves as following those approaches in EAP (including their philosophies and care towards horses) but there is nothing in place to ensure that any standards of practice are being followed besides the CRPO and psychotherapy certifications. As I will discuss later, multiple clinicians voiced their concern over this lack of oversight and industry standards, particularly as it related to how the horse is treated in and between EAP sessions. This patchwork pattern of professional regulations and industry standards characterize the Ontario EAP landscape. Currently, there are no central regulatory bodies for EAP clinicians in Ontario that are not attached to training programs.

Though the definition of EAP is quite broad, a typical EAP session may follow a sequence of events such as this: after completing various intake and administration tasks, the EAP clinician meets the EAP client, and then together they go to meet with the horse or horses involved in the clinician's practice. Some clinicians prefer to use just one horse in their sessions, and others may involve multiple horses or engage with an entire herd. Sessions may take place outside in a paddock or indoors in an arena, depending on the client and clinician's preferences.

From here, the process tends to be fairly client-led. The clinician may ask the client how they are feeling or what they are thinking of as they interact with the horse, or they may ask the client to practice certain exercises with the horse as a form of experiential learning. Other times, the clinician may ask the client to explain what they are observing in the horse and how they are interacting with the client, clinician, or other horses. Throughout all of this, the clinician may be observing both the client and the horse(s) to see if the horse is engaging in a practice called ‘mirroring,’ where the horse reflects the client’s body language and behaviours outwards. The clinician may pick up on this and share it with the client as a way of bringing attention to their emotions without being intrusive. Sometimes the EAP session is unstructured, following whatever happens in the session, and other times it is planned to help curate positive therapeutic experiences.

EAP clinicians in my study stressed the improvisational nature of many of their sessions where things do not always go to plan – the horse(s) will present the client and clinician with something unexpected, and together they can follow that thread for a unique, experiential therapeutic moment. As previously mentioned, depending on the model of EAP that the clinician was trained in, there may or may not be an equine specialist present who attends to the horse while the psychotherapist attends to the client. Clients may range in age from children to older adults and may attend for help with a variety of concerns, though anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and familial challenges were the most commonly cited. EAP clinicians may offer services specific to special populations (such as youth, service and emergency response professionals, or people with autism) but most of the clinicians I spoke with work with a generalized population. EAP sessions typically follow the clinical hour (55-minutes per session) and can range in cost from \$35 to \$300 per session, depending on the length of the

session, whether it is offered in a group format, and the EAP model that the clinician is trained in. EAP is not covered by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP), so EAP clinicians in private practice bill directly to the client or through their client's personal or work insurance benefits.

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Approach**

This project is situated at the convergence of a number of different theoretical and empirical literatures, with two that are of particular interest: first, literature on animal assisted therapy; and second, posthumanist literature that focuses on multispecies theories of being-with nonhumans and critical animal studies. While posthumanist and multispecies studies in care settings occupy the lion's share of my thinking, it is important to first map out the field of AAT and its connections to posthumanism. One problematic component of both EAP and leisure and sport riding that I will later discuss is that of the horse's perceived agency and role. EAP and sport and leisure riding are most often directed toward the fulfillment and advancement of the human. This is a problematic configuration that is further troubled by posthumanist and animal studies theorists who argue that scholars and laypeople should be centering and recognizing the subjectivity and agency of nonhuman animals in our encounters with them (Ogden, Hall and Tanita, 2013; Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010; Van Patter and Blattner, 2020). It is easy to romanticize multispecies relationships and the allure of animals in therapeutic scenarios, especially for those who have positive experiences with horses, as I surely do; posthumanist literatures have helped to keep my perspective honest. Though I recognize that humans are animals too, I will be following Don Kulick's (2017), Lauren Corman's (2016), and Kendra Coulter's (2016) terminological leads throughout the rest of this thesis to avoid confusion and overly clumsy jargon by referring to nonhuman animals as animals. There is a rich theoretical

discussion within posthumanism about the implications of using terms such as ‘more-than-human,’ ‘nonhuman,’ and ‘animals,’ but that is not the focus of my discussion (see: Ogden, Hall & Tanita, 2013; Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010).

### **Animal-Assisted Therapies**

Animal Assisted Therapies, as we know them today, have been used in various forms since 1961 when child psychologist Dr. Boris Levinson introduced his canine companion, Jingles, to his clients to help reduce emotional upset and disturbance (Levinson, 1962). Levinson deemed this new intervention “pet therapy,” and though he forecast that the field of psychotherapy would welcome it as a success, he was initially met with general skepticism. Since Dr. Levinson’s death in 1984, the field of AAT has become more mainstream, with increasing numbers of clinicians dedicated to involving animals in their therapeutic practices, as evidenced by the 38 private practitioners and 24 publicly funded organizations offering AAT services in Ontario alone (eMentalHealth, n.d). I only have to turn to my experiences as an undergraduate student at Western University where, as at other Ontario universities, it was common to attend therapy dog sessions with Mulligan the golden retriever and his handler every Tuesday and Thursday morning and visit temporary petting zoos in university buildings to help destress during midterms and final exams.

Though I have scoured the databases of multiple journals involving human-animal interactions to find articles on AATs suitable for this literature review, no book or article has been as helpful as Aubrey Fine’s (2015) edited collection on the state of the field of animal-assisted interventions. The foreword, written by psychologist Stanley Coren, offers a helpful overview of AATs and the field’s trajectories. Now defined as “a form of therapy... using an animal as a fundamental part of a person’s treatment” (Coren in Fine, 2015, pg. xix), AAT is no



longer relegated to only a select few animals; practices that once solely included common companion animals such as dogs and cats now include horses, dolphins, snakes, gerbils, pigs, falcons, and fish. Their clinical goals are multitudinous, too – while therapeutic animals were first utilized for psychotherapy, they now occupy positions in social work, physical therapy, speech therapy, and paraprofessional services (Fine, Tedeschi and Elvove, 2015).

The boom of the AAT industry has coincided with increased interest in the effectiveness of such therapies, promoting further professional investment and interaction among human-animal researchers and psychologists (Beck, Barker, Gee, Griffin and Johnson, 2018). By and large, most existing literature pertaining to AAT focuses on the quantifiable health and wellness benefits that AAT may offer its human participants, often measured through clinical psychometric scales of wellbeing (Shapiro, 2020; for meta-analyses demonstrating focus on clinical psychometric scales, see also Germain, Wilkie, Milbourne and Theule, 2018; Maujean, Pepping, and Kendall, 2015; Nimer and Lundahl, 2007; Santaniello et al., 2020). While this information is important, it does not capture the whole picture of multispecies healing relationships. The literature contains an over-abundance of studies investigating the human-canine relationship in canine therapy and guide dog programs, and there is a demonstrable dearth of information relating specifically to EAP, quantitative and qualitative research alike. Many of the authors involved in these studies do not take into consideration the role of the animal beyond their function as a tool or co-facilitator for the therapeutic encounter, centering the human therapy client and the clinical outcomes of EAP. Further, this literature tends to avoid addressing horses and other therapeutic animals as agentive subjects, reifying and falling into humanist traps of species segregation and human exceptionalism. Finally, literature pertaining to the clinical effectiveness of AAT and EAP stops shy of addressing the qualitative aspects of the therapeutic

relationships that contribute to and make such human clinical benefits possible. Part of the challenge of better understanding EAP is making sense of the qualitative benefits it offers, and how this may differ from leisure riding.

Though leisure riding may entail many of the benefits of EAP, there are several key differences that distinguish the two. First, EAP requires the presence of a trained clinical psychologist or counselor to facilitate therapy sessions. The presence of clinicians lends the process biomedical legitimacy, making EAP less “fringe” than other complementary or alternative therapeutic practices (Kruger and Serpell, 2010). That said, there are practitioners who utilize horses in their practice away from the auspices of a biomedical authority and do so in place of more traditional psychotherapies; these practitioners usually work under the guise of alternative medicine, and thus are considered less legitimate than biomedical EAP practitioners (Kruger and Serpell, 2010; Dean, Maurstad, and Davis, 2015). Second, EAP, particularly in comparison to leisure or sport riding, is not directed toward a goal of mastery over the horse or refinement of skills for competition. The goal of EAP tends to be more introspective, focused on cultivating self-mastery, self-concept, and self-confidence (McCormick and McCormick, 1997). Third, clients in EAP do not necessarily assume ‘expert’ roles in their therapeutic human-horse relationships, unlike some leisure or sport riders. EAP is characterized as a learning process, in which the horse is sometimes figured as the teacher, alongside the clinical practitioner or trainer (McCormick and McCormick, 1997). These three differences between EAP and leisure riding are key for my analysis – EAP clinicians may struggle to be recognized as scientifically legitimate by other mental health practitioners and psychotherapists, though at times their more holistic and spiritual approach toward EAP is attractive to potential clients. As well, the less-

domineering relationship between human and horse in EAP is highly relevant for my discussion about animal identity, rights, and agency.

Following the theme of understanding horse-human relationships in leisure riding scenarios, Dona Lee Davis, Anita Maurstad, and Sarah Dean published a 2015 study on the relationships non-professional equestrians have with their horses, recreational riding, and their wellbeing, demonstrating “how themes of pleasure, recreation, and therapy are interwoven” (pg. 299). Using life-course narratives, the authors investigated what exactly it is about horses that contributes to the “wellbeing of the ill AND the well-being of the well” (pg. 299), a query useful to both my interests in EAP and the question of the animal in AAT. Though the equestrians in Davis, Maurstad, and Dean’s study find therapeutic effects in their riding and horse-related practice, this is complicated by a self-pathologization of “addiction” to riding, in which horses are both their medicine and the cause for their physical and/or emotional upset. The participants in this study do not address the role of the horse as an agentic partner in their relationship, nor do they explicitly seek engagement with horses for therapeutic reasons; however, they demonstrate how the distinction between therapy and recreation is more fluid and ambiguous than previously considered (see Kruger and Serpell, 2010).

The wellbeing of the animal in AAT is typically not considered by researchers beyond what the animal needs to succeed in the therapeutic setting. While Davis, Maurstad and Dean (2015) were not concerned with the therapeutic encounter, they similarly focused primarily on the human participant’s experience of their relationship with their horses, with little thought given to the wellbeing of the horses. The participants in Davis, Maurstad, and Dean’s (2015) study have a lifetime of experiences with horses (and were thus likely already considering the relationships they have with their horses, and well positioned to engage in a multispecies

ethnography), as do most of the EAP clinicians in my study; therefore, I am similarly interested in assessing how EAP clinicians would “identify and comment on the therapeutic attributes of the horse” (pg. 303). So, I conclude here by again asking (as did Davis, Maurstad and Dean [2015]): what is it about “horsiness” in EAP that may result in a greater sense of wellbeing, and how can this multispecies healing relationship be improved for all participants, human and animal alike? It may be helpful to turn to posthumanism and multispecies studies to better understand the figure and utility of the horse.

### **Posthumanism and Critical Animal Studies**

My greatest concern relating to the majority of the EAP literature is the unapologetically humanist approach to AATs, in which all interventions culminate in the end-goal of enrichment, ‘improvement,’ and healing of the human therapy client centred in these encounters. While it is undeniable that AAT and EAP were established specifically to promote the health and wellbeing of humans, adequate stock must be given to the animal participants in these multispecies therapeutic encounters. A potential theoretical approach that may help me alleviate some of these concerns in my own study lies in the field of posthumanism. Posthumanism is a scholarly field emerging out of the postmodernist tradition that seeks to recognize that humans are not exceptional, and that the world is populated by nonhuman beings (including animals, plants, fungi, and other living matter), each with agency and deserving of “compassion, justice, and generosity” (LaCapra, 2018, pg. 68; Ogden, Hall & Tanita, 2013). Posthumanism is a response to humanist ideas, which “locate the identity and uniqueness of the human, privilege it, and set it apart as the apex of human history” (LaCapra, 2018, pg. 71; Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010). Posthumanism essentially situates the human within a broader web that includes all others in the world, recognizing our mutual interconnections and interdependencies; it posits that humans are

not untouchable or wholly independent of other beings. Recognition of this dependence is integral for treating others with care, compassion, and respect. One critical component of posthumanist thinking is an understanding that humans should not and cannot use nonhumans as expendable resources and assume unproblematized positions of domination (Corman, 2016). The importance of this posthumanist approach is the recognition that animals have rich inner lives, experiences, and personalities.

A major component of posthumanist theories is a general call to de-center the human, though there is no widely accepted frame of reference for how far this decentering should go; this is ultimately up to the researcher and the aims of their study. I have found Robert Kirk, Neil Pemberton and Tom Quick's 2019 article on "being well together" helpful in my thinking through the role of multispecies healing relationships (and how far to decenter the human), as the authors seek to introduce multispecies studies to the field of biomedical humanities. According to authors Laura Ogden, Billy Hall, and Kimiko Tanita (2013), multispecies studies and multispecies ethnography, influenced by scholars in Indigenous studies, animal studies and posthumanism, "is a project that seeks to understand the world as materially real, partially knowable, multicultural and multinatured, magical, and emergent through the contingent relations of multiple beings and entities" (pg. 6). If I apply Kirk, Pemberton and Quick's (2019) perspective to this context of EAP, it would be highly challenging to fully centre the horse in this healing relationship; the human receiving therapy, facilitated by the EAP clinician, is ultimately the focus of these relationships. After all, humans, too, are a species and therefore also have a place in multispecies studies. That said, *shifting* the focus to incorporate a theoretical consideration of the animal in EAP is critical work that has not yet been fully explored by scholars in AAT literatures.

Kirk, Pemberton and Quick (2019) bring together the goals of ‘flourishing’ in both biomedical humanities and animal studies research through this multispecies studies work, challenge the independent humanist perspective often promoted by a traditional biomedical approach, and highlight the role of therapeutic and service animals within the field of disability studies. Central to the authors’ perspectives is that multispecies studies in the biomedical humanities have the capacity to go beyond negative human-animal encounters (such as zoonoses, animal attacks, and animal exploitation in clinical research) to better understand how human-animal relationships can promote health and wellbeing. Part of this work involves better understanding how mainstream representations of animals and other nonhumans come to bear on their cultural value; we care more about retired guide dogs than we do retired medical maggots, despite both offering important services to the humans they are tasked to care for. This is reflected in our cultural valuations of horses, too – the way that we understand horses, for instance, is the result of ongoing social constructions that affect the way we approach our relationships with them (Coulter, 2014). These social constructions and cultural valuations come to bear on how they are treated and the care they are afforded.

Despite the relative novelty of posthumanist approaches within Western academia, similar ideas and approaches to the world have been integral to various Indigenous knowledges and ontologies for millennia. For example, Indigenous philosophies of relational personhood, or ‘being in relation’ with nonhuman beings (including animals, but also extending to bodies of water, plants, rocks, etc.) understand these beings as persons in a way that enables valuable relationships and kinship, with interdependent, intimate histories (TallBear, 2019). Margaret Robinson’s 2013 essay about veganism and Mi’kmaq legends demonstrates how animals are understood in Mi’kmaq cultures as beings who are capable of creating kinship relationships with

humans. This specific case study offers an example of the non-speciesist human-animal relationality that posthumanist and critical animal studies theories often strive to create, yet the dominant scholarship in these fields often end up appropriating certain Indigenous knowledges while subsuming the struggle for decolonization into a general call for interspecies justice (Belcourt, 2020). A relational personhood perspective naturally opens possibilities for understanding the relationships between humans and nonhumans in ways not confined by Western colonial sciences. How might EAP be understood once the focus of the healing relationship is shifted to better acknowledge horses as agentive and responsive beings already enmeshed in relationships with humans and other animals?

These understandings of the world have been used by colonial states against Indigenous communities to stereotype them as aligned with nature (and therefore less-than human) to, at least in part, justify dispossession of their lands and cultures (Belcourt, 2020; Ives, 2019; Simpson, 2017; Ahuja, 2009). Part of the challenge of incorporating a posthumanist perspective is acknowledging that many Indigenous and racialized communities, as well as those who are disabled, still struggle to be recognized as fully human, and for good reason may not wish to be further aligned with animals (Ives, 2019; Taylor, 2011; Ahuja, 2009). These are also the communities that are often ‘spoken for’ by researchers and whose representations in Western literatures have traditionally been harmful and stigmatizing. Some scholars have taken heed of these challenges within posthumanism and critical animal studies, and instead consider humans and animals together rather than positioning animals as analogous to humans. Take, for instance, Harlan Weaver’s 2013 essay about pit bull ownership, in which he reflects on the inherited histories of dog fighting, racialization, and whiteness in pit bull ownership circles. Weaver draws on a Deleuzean understanding of ‘becoming in kind’ to describe the ways in which racialization,

gender, and class intersect to create certain meanings through his interactions with Haley, his adopted pit bull. While calling into question the explicitly racialized language used by pit bull owners and advocacy organizations to describe anti-pit bull legislation in the United States, Weaver makes sense of the ‘uneasy loves’ embedded in pit bull cultures. By refusing to align anti-pit bull legislation with racial segregation, and instead interrogate how race, gender, and class intersect in pit bull cultures, Weaver creates space for a more nuanced discussion about racism and perceived speciesism that doesn’t equate the two.

This nuance is needed in critical animal studies, where racism and speciesism are sometimes considered together as analogous. Critical animal studies is indeed amenable to change, as evidenced by the shifting understanding of the animal’s agency and subjectivity. In his review of the field of human-animal anthropology, Don Kulick (2017) describes the changes that have taken place in the loosely defined field of animal studies over the past 120 years. While animal studies started in the early 1900s with a desire to teach apes to learn human language, it has since shifted to humans attempting to learn the language of animals. Part of this change in research focus was due to the advent of the field of ethology (or the study of animal communication), and this research has opened the door to a new focus that aims make sense of animal subjectivity and sentience. Attempting to understand the animal’s subjectivity has been a prominent concern in animal studies since the 1990s, when animal liberation scholars began building a case for animal freedoms and protections, often from a paternalistic and infantilizing point of view. The conversation has changed since then (largely due to the development of critical animal studies during the early 2000s) towards attempts to theorize humans and animals as equals rather than positioning the animal as more special, innocent, or deserving of protection



than the human, as passive victims of human oppression lacking a voice or agency (Corman and Vandrovцова, 2014; Blattner, Coulter and Kymlicka, 2020).

Though critical animal studies is predominantly concerned with the politics of animal liberation, some scholars in the field also strive to take issues of intersectionality seriously. Critical animal studies takes as its central concern the issue of power relations within human-animal relationships, sometimes employing intersectional analyses to make connections between animal and human suffering. According to Corman and Vandrovцова (2014), critical animal studies “explicitly emphasizes how different forms of domination, oppression, and power interlock and mutually influence each other” (p. 137). This intersectional perspective demands an understanding of how representation of the human and animal influences (and is influenced by) structures of power and refusal, allowing for solidarity across species boundaries.

In the AAT literatures, there is a clear gap of critical research about animal-assisted therapies pertaining to the role of the horse in EAP. By taking a critical posthumanist approach informed by work on animal labour and identity, I hope to address this gap by taking seriously the agency and subjectivity of horses in the horse-human relationship and considering how to make this relationship more equitable. Part of this will involve ensuring a thoughtful representation of horses in EAP. Though it is impossible to interview the horses directly for this project, I hope that I can come to understand their experiences as filtered through the accounts of the humans they work with. Following Kirk, Pemberton and Quick (2019), I believe that human-animal partnerships can promote health and wellbeing, as is hopefully demonstrated by EAP, but they may also demonstrate other ways of being in the world, and how those ways are informed by cultural assumptions. One of my secondary aims for this project is to become more aware of how these assumptions shape the EAP encounter.

## Methods

I approach this project with an interpretivist epistemology, in which the complexities of humans and their rationales are acknowledged, and research works to contextualize these rationales and make them more clear (Green and Thorogood, 2018). This approach recognizes a reality that exists beyond the participant's experiences of events and can connect subjective experiences and accounts in the clinical EAP setting to a broader social context, allowing for meaningful theoretical contributions (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2014). As such, I recognize that one of the major aims of this project is to understand how EAP clinicians interpret and make sense of their EAP experiences and relationships. Ideally, I would have been able to employ a multispecies ethnography to further understand the complexity of human and horse interactions and relationships. This would have enabled me to directly observe how horse-human relationships are enacted in the EAP context and would have been especially helpful in better understanding how horses and humans communicate with each other. Considering the time constraints and issues posed by conducting fieldwork during the COVID-19 pandemic, this was not feasible.

The question of interpretation and representation of research participants is always relevant in qualitative studies, and this is further complicated by attempting to address non-human actors who cannot 'speak' for themselves in ways traditionally valued by humans and Western colonial sciences (Madden, 2014; Van Patter and Blattner, 2020). Although interview methods privilege the voices of human actors, I hope a consistently mindful and reflexive approach, informed by posthuman knowledges, can help to guide me away from human exceptionalism to better understand all actors in multispecies care settings. Challenges presented by not being able to interview the horse participants are broadly representative of challenges

doing multispecies ethnography as a whole; while horses cannot ‘speak,’ I can interview humans with intimate knowledges of these species, and those who care for them, including their specific likes and dislikes and unique personalities (Davis, Maurstad and Cowles, 2013). Additionally, some aspects of EAP do not need to be verbalized by the horses to be understood; privileging ‘talk’ as the only legitimate form of communication does a disservice to all who are nonverbal, human and animal alike (Van Patter and Blattner, 2020). I approach this methodological challenge with the understanding that we inhabit ‘common worlds’ (Latour, 2005) with our equine companions. By guarding against humanist interpretations of equine communication (interpreted through human accounts), I hope I can adequately re-present the horses that will be indirect participants in this study.

The methods I used in my thesis project followed a basic interview-based structure. After obtaining ethics clearance from the General Research Ethics Board at Queen’s University (Appendix A), I set about recruiting EAP clinician participants. Using publicly available contact information, I sent recruitment emails to 22 EAP clinicians or practices in Ontario with basic details about my project and my recruitment poster. After emailing back-and-forth with several clinicians and ensuring that my participant criteria was fulfilled, 12 EAP practitioners agreed to participate in my study. I interviewed 10 EAP clinicians who work and live in Ontario, as well as two equine specialists who partner with EAP practitioners during EAP sessions with clients. The clinicians I spoke with were predominately white, middle-class, cis-identifying women, and all had received formal post-secondary education. One clinician self-identified as Indigenous, and the rest were settlers. Most clinicians practiced in Southern Ontario, clustered around the Greater Toronto Area, Southwestern Ontario, and Southeastern Ontario. I think that the relative homogeneity of my participants reflects the demographics of the EAP field writ large, and

though I do not incorporate a gendered analysis of caring professions in general, there are indeed significant gendered components of EAP and the psychotherapeutic profession. One clinician in particular (Julie) identified the homogeneity of the field as a problem, stating that she wanted to see greater diversity in EAP clinicians as well as clients. Since EAP is typically not publicly funded, clients are more likely to be middle- or upper-class and able to pay out of pocket for EAP sessions or have personal health insurance that covers private services.

The interviews were in-depth and semi-structured, following the interview guide (Appendix B), with questions that were broad enough to allow for my participants to elaborate further and take the interview where they wanted to go. I asked questions that broadly addressed how EAP works, what sets it apart from other kinds of psychotherapies or talk therapies, why clients tend to be drawn to EAP, the role of the horse in EAP, and whether the clinician has any concerns about the wellbeing of the horse or the work they are required to do. After my first several interviews, I started asking clinicians to describe what an EAP session might look like in their practice, as well as how they would describe the overall professional landscape of EAP in Ontario. When interviewing the equine specialists for this project, I altered the guide slightly to better reflect their expertise and experiences of EAP. Though I did not initially consider interviewing equine specialists, I found that their attention to the role of the horse in the EAP encounter was helpful in better understanding the relationship and power dynamics that play out during the EAP session.

Each participant received a copy of the interview guide in advance to help them prepare for the interview and allow them to make an informed choice in whether they wished to participate, and I reviewed the Letter of Information and Consent Form (Appendix C) with each participant individually before obtaining their consent and starting the interview. Most interviews

lasted between 30 to 60 minutes and were conducted over Zoom or phone call. Interviews were recorded on Zoom and then auto transcribed by Otter.ai transcription software before I reviewed them for accuracy, de-identification, and basic formatting issues. After my transcriptions were completed and pseudonyms were assigned, I sent the transcripts back to my participants via email for their review. I first sent them a copy over Microsoft Word's online platform, which allowed them to make changes to the transcript in review mode or add comments, which I could then incorporate or address and which they would be able to see before the final copy of the transcript had been saved. Some changes were made to help safeguard the clinicians' privacy and to protect the private details of their clients, which had occasionally arisen in anecdotes during our conversation to help illustrate how EAP works. Overall, the clinicians and equine specialists I spoke with expressed only minor concerns about the transcripts that were easily addressed by removing small sections of the interview.

Upon the completion of my transcripts, I began the work of coding my interview data. I used a thematic content analysis approach (Braun and Clark, 2006) to develop codes that I then organized into 2 major themes: (1) clinician anxiety over biomedical legitimacy of EAP; and (2) the role of the horse in EAP as just-horse or more-than horse. Each major theme has multiple contributing sub-themes that I will discuss in further detail in Chapters 2 and 3. I spent a significant amount of time coding my interview transcripts, but it was not until I was tasked with creating a brief presentation about my project that I was able to think through each code to create an analytic narrative that tied together the seemingly contradicting sentiments of my interview data in a way that felt cohesive; a good amount of my thinking was refined and made legible during the process of attempting to explain my research to a room of academics and grad students who were not already steeped within the field of multispecies studies and EAP.

Though I had initially planned to interview both clients of EAP and clinicians of EAP, I ended up only interviewing EAP clinicians and equine specialists. This is the result of multiple factors. Firstly, I had much greater success recruiting EAP clinicians than anticipated, and I expected that reaching EAP clients through social medial or physical postings at barns would be a challenge. Secondly, I had hoped to incorporate the recommendations of my committee members by narrowing the scope of my project: focusing on the experiences of a single professional community seemed much more manageable than balancing both the experiences of EAP clinicians and clients. As well, after meeting with my committee and taking a significant amount of time to think about how best to ensure that the horses working within EAP contexts are well-represented, it seemed logical that the clinicians who worked with and cared for them would be best suited to discuss their roles as horses within the psychotherapeutic context, instead of the clients who might reasonably be considering how the horses factor into their individual healing journeys.

### **Methodology and the Ethics of Representation**

Interviewing only EAP clinicians is not enough to resolve any and all potential crises of representation (that is, the challenge of ethically or accurately representing an Other), nor does it necessarily simplify the analysis or scope of this project. I still have concerns about the personal and professional investment that EAP clinicians have in relation to the representation of their work. This is particularly troublesome when it comes to the discussion of the relationships EAP clinicians have with the horses they work with and how their needs are addressed and cared for, in both the psychotherapeutic context and their lives more generally. I will discuss this at greater length in Chapters 2 and 3, but overall, my EAP clinician participants tended to be a bit defensive when it came to discussing the importance and ethics of EAP. This should not have

come as a surprise to me; though EAP clinicians are all certified and recognized as biomedical practitioners, and most sessions should be covered by any insurance plans that recognize traditional forms of talk-therapy, there is a general and persisting confusion about what EAP is and how it works. This confusion, combined with a general apprehension of the seriousness of therapies involving somewhat novel components (such as animal interactions, play-based learning, experiential education, etc.) tends to manifest in the questioning of the legitimacy of EAP as a psychotherapeutic healing modality.

Many of my participants were quite enthusiastic about participating in my project, stating that they wanted to contribute to the knowledge base of EAP, and help solidify its status as a respected healing modality supported by academic literatures. My participants have a vested interest in how their field is portrayed, as any representations of EAP may come to bear on how potential clients, funding agencies, and other health professionals consider the importance of EAP. By participating in this project, the EAP clinicians in my study were able to contribute to an image of their field as one that is scientifically supported, while at the same time subversive in terms of how the horses are cared for and treated, and less threatening or imposing than traditional talk-therapies. This is not intended to corrupt my participants' accounts of their understanding or portrayals of EAP. Everyone approaches research with their own 'agenda' – just as I have conducted this study in part to fulfill the academic requirements of my master's degree, the EAP clinicians in my study may very well have participated to solidify the legitimacy of their field of practice. This was certainly not the only motivation that my participants expressed as their cause for participation, but it was by far the most prominent. That said, keeping the motivations of my research participants in mind may help to make sense of their accounts of EAP, and to lend context to some of the writing that follows this chapter.

As the scope of my thesis project has shifted, so too has my position relating to the horses that factor indirectly and sometimes anonymously into this work. Despite interviewing EAP practitioners directly, and hearing from them about the horses with whom they work and often care for, the horses in this study occupy a semi-visible, often evasive role. While I still take into consideration my representation of the horses involved in EAP, I cannot receive any further information about them besides what has been offered by the EAP practitioners and equine specialists. Because of this, the subjectivity of the horses involved in EAP are filtered not just through the EAP clinician's interpretation, but also through the way the EAP clinicians represented their horses to me.

While my participants likely know a great deal about the horses that they work with, any sort of representation of an Other, no matter how intimate, will always be partial and open to interpretation (Adams, 2005; Alcoff, 1991). There is something to be said, too, about assuming that there is some underlying 'truth' or experience that I am trying to represent through my research interviews and the writing of this thesis; despite my anxieties about properly representing the horses involved in EAP, it is impossible to ever really know what the Other is thinking or experiencing. Confidently asserting that I am trying to uncover the one, real 'truth' of EAP horses veers too closely to a positivist interpretation of the world for my liking. In November and December of 2021, I wrote a paper for a graduate methodologies course about the ethics of 'speaking for' animals. At the heart of this paper was the crisis of representation, though it took for granted that as a researcher I would have direct access to the animals that I would be representing, in addition to knowledge from those that knew the animals best. Given the scope of this project and the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to interact directly with the animals who feature so prominently, though indirectly, in this work. Thus,



while all accounts of an Other are partial, I must be especially cautious when interpreting information about the horses with whom the EAP clinicians work. This is crucial when working with populations who cannot speak back, and though an attention to power relations is always important, it is especially so here. As such, I try to complicate EAP clinicians' narratives of their horses in this thesis by challenging their ideas about animal labour and identity.

Most of the ethical and methodological literatures I have perused to help inform my analysis of EAP practitioner accounts have focused on researching vulnerable populations – typically, 'vulnerable populations' refers to those without institutional power or significant social and cultural resources, or communities who have historically been marginalized from mainstream society. As my participants all held professional certifications, with a significant amount of career experience and educational achievement, I would hesitate to consider them 'vulnerable.' As well, various critical animal studies scholars would likely cringe at the thought of calling the horses with whom EAP clinicians work 'vulnerable,' particularly given the patronizing and paternalistic history of animal rights movements that are centered on the presumed innocence, helplessness, and abject suffering of domesticated animals (Corman, 2016; Van Patter & Blattner, 2020). As Martina (one of my EAP clinician participants) said, "[the EAP horses] could just kill me if they wanted to. It wouldn't be that hard if they really wanted to, but they don't, and they don't want to." There is an acknowledgement that neither the clinician nor the horses in question are powerless or lacking agency, yet my representations of the EAP field could indeed affect the way it is perceived and culturally valued (LaCapra, 2018).

Representing the EAP field and EAP practitioners is not a task I take lightly. Throughout the writing of this thesis, and considering how best to approach my analysis, I have struggled to answer the question of who I am writing for. Though I originally intended to write with a focus

on multispecies healing relationships and the wellbeing of the horse, I find myself now feeling more accountable to the EAP clinicians whom I interviewed. I have struggled to balance this sense of accountability with the need for critical analysis – I care deeply about the responsibility I have to write about EAP in a way that does not harm the overall reputation of the EAP field or the professional lives of the clinicians who volunteered their time for my study. However, I also owe a debt to the horses who feature indirectly in this work, and I am compelled to take up questions of freedom, animal justice and welfare in a way that my participants may disagree with. This is not to say that the participants in my study did not think critically about the role their horses play in the therapeutic encounter, or that they do not have concerns about ‘speaking for’ their horses or how their lives are structured. However, calling into question the actual degrees of freedom which their horses may experience is a sensitive topic; the EAP clinicians I spoke to all expressed a great desire to ensure the wellbeing of their horses, though their understandings of what equine wellbeing is and looks like varied. Ultimately, I have a responsibility to approach this area of concern with a greater critical eye, particularly as it concerns power relations and questions of dominance.

### **Thesis Outline**

In this introduction, I have outlined my personal interests in EAP as a healing modality and offered a definition and background of various EFW practices in Ontario. I then reviewed the state of scholarly literature on AATs, finding little critical and theoretical engagement with EAP itself or the role of the horse in multispecies healing relationships. From here, I turned to a review of posthumanism and critical animal studies to address the theoretical perspectives that I believe are lacking in AAT literatures. My overview of posthumanism and critical animal studies effectively functions as my theoretical foundation for the rest of this thesis: I aim to take a

posthumanist approach to EAP that, at least partially, de-centers the human from our discussions. I take a lot of inspiration from Kirk, Pemberton and Quick's (2019) mantra of 'being well together' – it is my hope that at the end of the following chapters, I am able to make the vision of 'being well together' in EAP clearer for both EAP horses as well as clinicians.

Though posthumanism and critical animal studies offered me direction in terms of the critical perspective that I will be taking in this thesis, I extend this discussion further to address EAP clinicians' understandings of animal justice, labour, and identity in Chapter 2. I argue that EAP clinicians take one of three theoretical approaches in understanding the subjectivity of their horses in the EAP practice: identity, difference, or indistinction (Calarco, 2015). These approaches inform the way clinicians practice EAP and understand the horse-human relationship as a whole. A significant part of this chapter is devoted to a discussion about animal labour and the value of recognizing animals as 'workers,' and the potential that this has for encouraging more ethical and respectful relationships that do not necessarily have to be exploitative. I close this chapter with a discussion of what it might look like to transcend an identity-based recognition of rights for animals, and how the current discourse among most EAP clinicians still forecloses many opportunities to make new, transformative connections with human and animal Others.

In Chapter 3, I try to make sense of the discourses about scientific legitimacy and biomedical recognition that have resulted in EAP clinicians desiring the further professionalization of their field. This is the result of a number of factors, but primarily boils down to challenges with funding and professional recognition. Despite wanting to be recognized as biomedically legitimate and aligned with traditional psychotherapists, many EAP clinicians asserted that the value of EAP is found in its subversive, holistic approach to health and

wellbeing. I argue that these competing thoughts about the value of EAP highlight a tension at the core of the practice – EAP clinicians require biomedical recognition to receive funding and institutional support for their work, but clinicians and their clients tend to be drawn to EAP because it is different from most traditional talk therapies. Part of this is due to its spiritual nature, which is fundamentally at odds with the Western scientific epistemology that informs most post-Enlightenment research and knowledge production. I argue that this points to a significant failure of Western scientific epistemologies, as certain contributors to healing and wellbeing evade measurement and quantification. I close this chapter with a discussion about what this means for the state of EAP in Ontario and how clinicians might go about reconciling demands for professionalization with the challenge of over-regulating EAP.

I conclude by drawing attention to some of the foundational tensions that inform my analysis in both Chapters 2 and 3. Part of this involves an attempt to fulfill my goals of making our mutual dependencies with animals clearer and imagining other ways of being in the world through EAP horse-human relationships. I offer some areas for further research, which largely stem out of gaps in my own project and my interviews with EAP clinicians. I close with a final reflection on animal freedoms in EAP and the shortcomings of the dominant Western scientific epistemology that influences both animal rights frameworks as well as research on psychotherapeutic practices, and the importance of overcoming these epistemological limitations to better imagine what it might mean to flourish and be well, together.

## Chapter 2

### The Role of the Horse in Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy: Human-Horse Interactions, Animal Identity and Work

Prior to starting this project, I was familiar with the general discourse of ‘horse as therapist’ that circulated in horsey worlds. One only has to Google “my horse is my therapist” to be inundated with a slew of witty mugs, bumper stickers, and graphic t-shirts, with slogans such as: “my therapist eats hay,” “my therapist lives in a barn,” “my therapist has four legs and a long mane,” or “my therapist has hooves” (Figure 1).

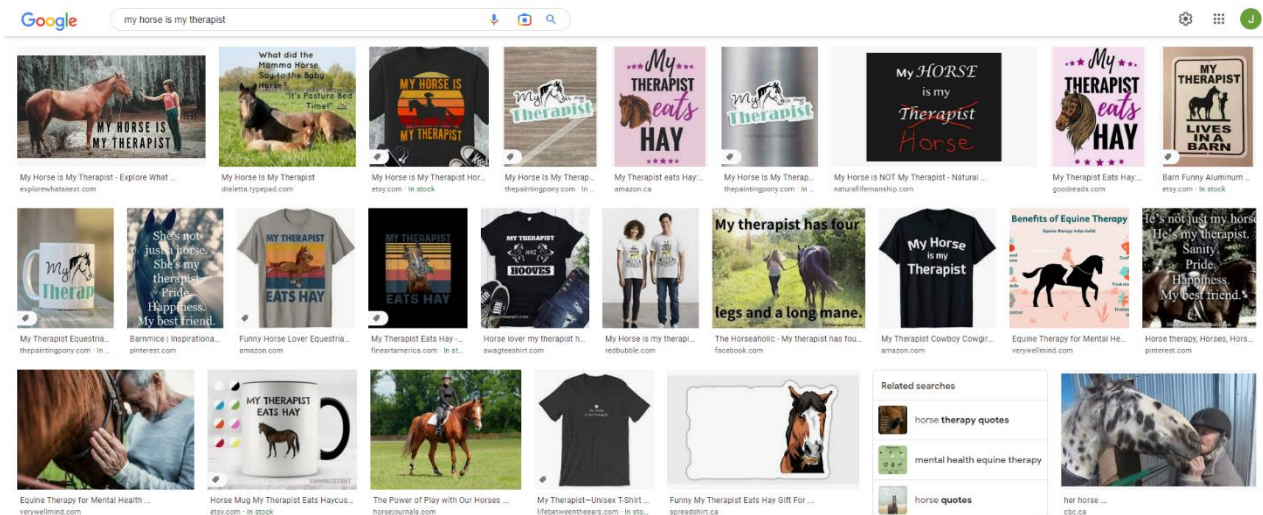


Figure 1: screenshot, taken June 23rd at 3:45 PM by Jill Takacs.

This sort of discourse was commonplace among the leisure riders that I knew at the barn while growing up, and I had never taken it very seriously. Certainly, being in the barn and riding horses helped me clear my mind and was a welcome form of escapism, but as I embarked on this project I had assumed that proponents of this discourse were, at least in part, jesting. This sort of conceptualization of horses and horseback riding as therapeutic is also the subject of Davis, Maurstad and Dean’s 2015 work on the medicalization of pleasure among female equestrians, where the boundaries of riding for pleasure and riding for therapeutic purposes are blurred. It

was these ideas about the therapeutic effects of horse-human relationships that lead me to pursue my project about EAP in the first place; therefore, when hearing these ideas repeated in my interviews with EAP clinicians, I was expecting it, yet still caught off-guard as it came from accredited and CRPO certified psychotherapists. This could simply be attributed to the fact that many of the EAP clinicians I spoke with had experience as leisure riders prior to the development of their EAP career; however, their repeated insistences that their horses worked as teachers, helpers, friends and healers in the EAP session was impossible to ignore. As one of the central aims for this project is to better understand how the horse's presence affects EAP, and how the horse's experience in EAP could be improved or better understood, it is important to critically analyze the horse-as-therapist discourse among EAP clinicians and interrogate how various understandings of the horse's role in EAP come to bear on the way they are treated and understood inside and outside of their working contexts.

In the section that follows, I offer a brief background and literature review about the theories I use to develop my analysis of the role the horse plays in EAP settings, focusing on posthumanist and critical animal studies perspectives that work to make sense of animal identities and animal labour, drawing primarily on work from Matthew Calarco, Donna Haraway, Nik Hamilton and Lindsay Taylor, Jocelyne Porcher, and Kendra Coulter. From here, I will analyze a selection of quotes from my interviews that demonstrate what clinicians perceived as the horses' characteristics that make them an important part of the EAP session and the clinicians' understanding of animal identity and labour. Finally, I will return to a discussion about the implications of choosing to assign identities to the animals one relies upon for their work. I argue that the indistinction approach to animal recognition has transformative potential for rejecting anthropocentric means of recognition in and beyond the field of EAP. I will

compare these perspectives of the horse-as-therapist and an overall tendency for EAP clinicians to assign human-like identities to their horses against the accounts of three EAP clinicians who refused or hesitated to assign their horses identities and responsibilities as therapists. I conclude that the approach taken by EAP clinicians informs how they practice EAP and understand the horse-human relationship as a whole. A secondary but important part of my discussion will focus on the animal indistinction perspective that likens humans to animals and rejects anthropocentric models of animal rights and freedoms.

### **Identity, Difference, Indistinction: Three Approaches to Animal Ethics**

Matthew Calarco (2015) writes about the three leading schools of thought within critical animal studies regarding approaches to animal ethics: identity, difference, and indistinction. The first approach, concerning itself with issues of animal identity, seeks to humanize animals by recognizing certain anthropocentric traits and behaviours that are typically associated with humans. By recognizing these traits, animal activists argue that human-like animals should be treated with the same integrity and respect as humans. This school of thought is in response to several key scholars that shaped traditional Western philosophy, including: Aristotle, who argued that animals lack *logos*, or rationality, occupying a sentience between plants and humans; René Descartes, who argued that animals are automatons who lack both a mind and sense of self, thus experimenting on them and consuming their flesh was defensible; and Immanuel Kant, whose thoughts on animals closely resembles those of Descartes, albeit with a slightly more ethical tone advocating against cruel and unnecessary treatment. These theoreticians position animals as those lacking rational minds and subjectivity, sorely at odds with the logical, rational, self-possessed human. In order to overcome this traditional, humanist perspective, CAS scholars have relied on the evolutionary continuity between humans and animals proposed by Charles Darwin,

which makes the differences between species seem less insurmountable. From here, scholars may urge others to treat likes alike, in essence, to treat human-like animals like humans in the ethos of an equal consideration of interests. Without diving too deeply into the pool of pro-animal scholars who have pushed this perspective forward, three major requirements for animals to be treated like humans stand out: sentience (or the capacity to experience pleasure and pain), subjectivity (or the capacity to “believe and feel things, recall and expect things” [Regan, 1989]), and intentionality. Ultimately, aligning animals who possess these capacities with humans would suggest that they deserve to be treated according to a similar schema of rights.

One of the major limitations of this approach is *logocentrism*, or the overemphasis on logic, rationality, reasoning, et cetera. Not only does logocentrism highly restrict which animals and other nonhumans can be treated with respect, but it also calls into question the rights afforded to humans who do not or cannot reason, rely on logic, or display rationality. This is fundamentally a disability rights issue as well as an animal rights issue, insofar as logocentrism excludes both humans and animals from the world of respect and dignity offered by such anthropocentric reasoning. Following this approach, species boundaries still remain largely intact, and the human-centric model against which all living things must be compared goes unchallenged.

The second school of thought within CAS is one of difference – that is, recognizing and appreciating “the manifold differences that exist between human beings and animals” (Calarco, 2015, pg. 28). Critically, difference theorists reject humanism by proposing that no individual being, no matter how ideal, is ever wholly constituted by and of itself. Instead, individuals “emerge from a complex series of relations (historical, cultural, economic, linguistic, and so on) and that human nature cannot be understood outside these relations.” (Calarco, 2015, pg. 31).



Within this perspective, individuals are shaped and changed by their encounters with Others, especially those that are so radically different from oneself that they demand a response. When considering the animal, the decentering of the human has the effect of calling into question how the human has been defined through differentiation from the animal. This means recognizing the richness of variety and difference within the human as well as the animal, and to avoid essentializing both by overly relying on human/animal distinctions (yet still keeping these distinctions intact).

Finally, contrasting both the identity-based and difference-based schools of thought within CAS, I would like to draw attention to the school of thought that more closely resembles my own theoretical approach: that of indistinction, which calls on pro-animal theorists to refrain from centering and redefining humanity to instead *animalize* the human. This perspective calls for a recognition of the animality of humans and works most congruously with a posthumanist perspective that seeks to dismantle boundaries between humans, nonhumans, plants, animals, and all living Others. The ethic of indistinction is at odds with that of identity, and it doesn't pose the issue of exclusion to beings who do not or cannot fulfill certain humanist criteria. Compared to the ethic of difference, indistinction requires us not to complicate, multiply, and amplify the differences between us all, but instead asks that we "set aside the concern with anthropological differences" to develop alternate lines of thought (Calarco, 2015, pg. 51). Donna Haraway, a key indistinction thinker and a major source of inspiration for the writing of this thesis, argues against the need for separation in and between species, instead emphasizing and "affirm[ing] the pleasure of connection of human and other living creatures" (Haraway, 1991, pg. 151). I gravitate toward this component of indistinction particularly when considering the magnetism of EAP and horse-human relationships – is it not the quality of 'being well together' that makes this

modality particularly attractive to clients and clinicians alike? The practical importance of this approach is the ways in which we may come to understand our relationships with animals differently; to follow Deleuze and Guattari's lead, by becoming-animal, the animal "also becomes something else" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, pg. 109). When we align ourselves with animals, and see ourselves in animals, we understand them differently. This, ultimately, is the transformative and radical potential of an indistinction ethic.

Before going any further, it is critical to draw attention to potential critiques of the indistinction approach. Much like the concerns associated with posthumanism and critical animal studies, the animal indistinction approach may pose challenges to those who have historically struggled to be recognized as humans in the first place and may wish to avoid further animalization. As outlined by Sarah Ives (2019), Neel Ahuja (2009), and other critical posthumanist scholars, there are indeed limitations to this approach – peoples who belong to communities that have historically been oppressed and denied their humanity as a means to segregate, disempower, and ultimately police the place of disability, racialization, and indigeneity in society may be hesitant to embrace an ethic of animality in the context of identity. None of the three approaches toward animal recognition are perfect; in spite of this, I believe the indistinction approach at the very least opens up opportunities for animalization to not necessarily be a negative thing.

I draw attention to these differing perspectives in CAS because they exemplify the contrasting perspectives that my EAP clinician participants demonstrated in their interviews. The majority of my participants spoke about their horses in a way that recognized their sentience, subjectivity and intentionality, and this recognition was the grounds for which they offered their horses certain human-like identities: as therapists, friends, co-workers and teachers. These

identities also came with various human-like rights and privileges, from the right to refuse work and participate in an EAP session to the privilege of resting and taking ‘mental health’ days. In contrast to the animal identity perspective is that of the animal difference and animal indistinction approaches; only three of the EAP clinicians explicitly rejected the ‘horse-as-therapist’ perspective that characterized the animal identity discourse, which tended to respect the horses for who they are, and often coincided with a more radical understanding of what it means to take good care of horses. While psychotherapists were typically quite clear about which theoretical camp they were in, there is still overlap in some accounts and such understandings are not so easily delineated and defined. For instance, the animalizing of human clients and blurring of species boundaries came up from time to time in my interviews with psychotherapists who offered human-like identities to their horses, and still clinicians with less orthodox understandings of good horse care did not fit entirely within the animal indistinction camp and tended to oscillate between an animal difference and indistinction philosophy.

Following this discussion of identity, difference and indistinction is the issue of representation – beyond subscribing to a certain philosophy of animal rights, what effects does the cultural representation of animals have on their everyday lives? If horses are considered workers, or animals, or persons, how does this affect the way they are valued and treated by individual psychotherapists, clients, and other humans? I find this particularly important for the horses who are identified as therapists or workers. I follow the lead of Lindsay Hamilton and Nik Taylor in their 2013 book, *Animals at Work*, who argue that identities are unstable and in negotiation, shifting with the relations in which they are constituted and co-produced. While the approach taken by Taylor and Hamilton to animal identity and work can be best understood within the animal difference framework, those who tend to understand animals as workers

(especially within my study) usually do so within the animal identity framework. Hamilton and Taylor's difference approach to identity suggests that we come to understand who we are and ascribe meaning to our actions and roles by defining them in relation to other people, structures, and activities. Our identities are validated by others when we are recognized in certain contexts and ways, and this also shifts and contributes to our identity. This perspective includes the identity of animals, too – where interaction is possible, so too is the production and mediation of identity. I am not arguing that animals are necessarily conscious of the identities they are given or recognized by, but that they come to unwittingly brandish such identities nonetheless, and these identities come to bear on how they are treated, talked about, and valued. What could this mean for animals that work closely with humans?

### **On Animal Identity: Animal Workers**

In Hamilton and Taylor's (2013) descriptions of their ethnographic work in veterinary clinics, slaughterhouses, cattle farms and animal sanctuaries, the human-animal interactions that take place are vital to the successful management of the working organizations. For instance, human workers require certain forms of cooperation from the animals with whom they work, and this sort of cooperation can form the basis of a more complex relationship. Depending on the kind of working context and environment, the human worker may either begin to acknowledge the complexity of the animal or reject its subjectivity in favour of a more objectlike understanding, as is often the case in farming work. Those who reject the animal's agency and subjectivity, choosing to conceptualize them as objects, tend to do so to make the duties of their job more manageable – for instance, poorly paid workers in animal kill plants and chicken farms are able to detach themselves from the suffering of the animals by refusing to think of them as living things – they are products, or units, or consumable resources waiting to be further refined

and packaged for shipment and sale. For those who actively choose to complicate their understanding of the animal's agency and subjectivity, this cooperation can take on greater meaning to the point where the animal is understood as a person, too, whose cooperation or non-cooperation with the human involved can be rationalized and made meaningful according to logical explanations, most often tying back to the animal's personhood. This is observed in work within animal shelters and sanctuaries, where animals are recognized as persons with distinct histories, traumas, likes and dislikes, and unique personalities.

By coming to understand the horse as a person in EAP, the clinicians who interact so intimately with them tend to engage in a 'pulling in' of the horses to a shared EAP world that ascribes human-like identities to horses that then come to be understood as a family member, co-worker, or friend, and not just as an animal. In human-animal interactions, the work of identity formation involves boundary work – that is, the “drawing and blurring of lines of demarcation between humans and animals” (Arluke and Sanders, 1996, pg. 133). Within EAP settings, this is particularly important. By figuring the horse as a teacher, helper, healer or friend, the EAP clinicians effectively blur the boundaries between human and animal roles and responsibilities. By understanding their horses are more than objects, and understanding them as sentient, agentic beings, with an attention to the importance and centrality of the horse within their work and relationships, EAP clinicians rally against the traditional Western humanist perspective that often defines human-animal interactions. This aligns EAP clinicians with the animal identity perspective identified in Calarco's (2015) analysis of the animal identity appeal to animal rights. If animals are workers, and workers cooperate and offer their labour in the shared world of work, then they must also possess the qualities of sentience, subjectivity, and intentionality that aligns them with humans and thus affords them humanlike rights and privileges.

This brings me to ask the following: what does it mean for an animal, in this case a horse, to be considered a worker? Though it is commonly argued that being a worker is simply to make oneself available to exploitation to generate profit in a capitalistic society, work is contextual and contingent on a variety of things – the quality of work, kind of work, and importance of work all come to bear on whether working is a positive and affirming experience or a negative one. Working occupies a significant part of our lives as humans and, for many, offers a sense of meaning and value. Being a worker becomes an identity, and one that animals are not precluded from assuming. In thinking through this idea, I have found Vinciane Despret’s *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions?* (2016) helpful, particularly her chapter “W For Work: Why do we say that cows don’t do anything?” In this piece, Despret revisits the arguments of Jocelyne Porcher, a French sociologist whose research explores ideas of animal agency, subjectivity, and work in primarily French animal husbandry worlds. It is Porcher’s (2014) view that animals and humans occupy different worlds, but come to co-create a world shared through the experience of work – felt by handlers and their service dogs navigating the physical environment together, veterinarians palpating the stomachs of dogs who have eaten garbage or other indigestibles who must work together to verbalize the dog’s ailments for the owner, and horses and their human EAP clinicians or equine specialists teaming up in the psychotherapy session to help a client work through their emotions and experiences. Indeed, “living with animals signifies working with them” (Porcher, 2014, pg. 2). Porcher (2014) approaches the idea that recognizing domesticated animals as workers presents the opportunity for humans to consider the agency and subjectivity of animal workers more seriously, which may offer very real benefits to the animals as they are regarded with more respect and recognition for their labour.

Continuing with the value of work and being recognized as a worker, it is integral that animal workers do not just get recognized as workers, but that they have good jobs with ongoing protections. I find Kendra Coulter's proposal for 'humane jobs' – that is, jobs that “are good for people and animals, and that are underscored by multispecies respect” (2017, pg. 30) – most appealing. These jobs may bring pleasure to the animals that are involved and are not to be understood as inherently exploitative. Rather, they are one part of a larger vision for humane and caring societies that do not rely on the unpaid and unrecognized labour of humans or animals. Coulter argues that domesticated animals are invariably a part of our societies, and thus animal labour is, too – insofar as we try to protect the rights of humans in working environments, we should also protect the rights of animal workers. This is integral for the foundation of a just society, and perhaps by recognizing the work that animals already do, and advocating for better protections in that work, we may inch closer toward an interspecies solidarity in which all animals, no matter how different they are from us or we are from them, are valued and respected.

As Coulter (2019) mentions, work is not always inherently positive – indeed, there are still opportunities for the animals to be exploited or exposed to unsafe working and living conditions, and despite the possibility of resistance and acts of agency, the balance of power is typically in favour of their human handlers (Hamilton & Taylor, 2013). I see glimmers of Calarco's indistinction approach to animal ethics in both Coulter's and Porcher's understanding of animal work – by living together, working together, and sharing worlds and meaning, both authors offer a way to look at animal work and labour through a lens that does not require humanizing animals or overemphasizing the differences within and between species. Porcher's focus on working and living together with animals calls on humans to see their likeness to animals, not animals' likeness to humans. This perspective is, at its core, concerned with the

transformation of relations between humans and animals through this recognition. Though I disagreed with Porcher's and Coulter's perspectives at first due to my own initial ambivalence regarding whether animals are cognizant of their labour, I have come to share their views about the importance of recognizing (and improving) animal work – what does it mean for the horses involved in EAP to be considered workers, and treated as such?

Jocelyne Porcher and Lindsay Hamilton and Nik Taylor were all fortunate enough to rely on multispecies ethnographic methods to better understand how such worker identities are managed and negotiated in practice. Much of this work involved observing how the animals in each area of study responded, reacted, and managed themselves in their interactions with humans to develop an understanding of what the co-creation of human-animal working worlds looked like and felt like. I do not have this privilege. Though I am lucky enough to rely on 'key participants' who know the horses whom they are talking about intimately, everything I am writing about in this thesis has been filtered through the sieve of conversation with EAP clinicians. I am analyzing how EAP clinicians constructed the 'animal worker' identity for the horses involved in EAP, and how this seemingly translates into the clinicians' relationships with their horses, but I cannot speak to the lived material differences experienced by the horses because of these identity formations. This analysis follows Taylor and Hamilton's (2013) line of inquiry regarding "*how and why* it is that the animal becomes constructed as a deserving focus for human affection" (pg. 7), what this tells us about both animal and human identity, and how this sense of animal 'deservedness' is achieved.



## Analysis

### Characteristics of the Horse in EAP

Before discussing the identities that EAP clinicians did (or didn't) assign to their horses, it is important to first explore the characteristics of horses (both species-specific and horse-specific) that make them an important part of the therapeutic process. While it is possible that all horses share some traits specific to their species, individual horses have their own traits, quirks, and personalities that contribute to the formation of their human-assigned identity. Hamilton and Taylor (2013) state that regular activities and behaviours typical of a species or breed may be understood by humans as part of an individual animal's personality, thereby contributing to its identity assignment – I do my best to delineate between the more general characteristics expressed by most horses and those that are seemingly more individual-specific, but there is bound to be overlap between the two as EAP clinicians interpret their horses' characteristics and behaviours differently.

#### *Species-Specific Characteristics*

When probed about the characteristics of horses that make them an appropriate fit for EAP, most psychotherapists started by referencing the evolutionary drive and biological programming of their horses as prey animals. Typically, this referred to the horses' heightened awareness of others' emotions, body language, and overall energy levels. Psychotherapists claimed that because their horses are biologically programmed to be alert to predators and prepared to run at a moment's notice, they were constantly sizing up the humans they interacted with in EAP and trying to determine their intentions. Cherise illustrated this in the following quote:

I always sort of begin by talking about horses being very intuitive animals and how they are prey animals. They're always aware of their surroundings because they need to for safety. Horses are pack animals, they don't like to be left alone. They're always paying attention so their ears will move, we'll see what's happening there. Where are their eyes, what's their body feel like, does it look like the horse is relaxed or not, getting a person to be aware of what the horse is telling them.

One of the parts of the horses' prey drives that proved useful in the EAP session often involved something commonly referred to as 'mirroring'; essentially, the horses would read the human client's emotions, body language, or energy levels, and reflect it back to them as a sort of defence mechanism. This characteristic was particularly important for the work being done in EAP clinicians' practices, as it gave the clinicians an organic entrance to pick up on what the client was feeling or experiencing and invite the client to think about what the horse was showing, assign their behaviours or disposition meaning, and think about how it potentially connected to their own life. Paulina drew on this idea of mirroring when explaining why horses are impactful in the EAP experience:

...horses, because of the way their brains are, part of their survival technique is being able to mirror what is happening in the environment. So, they're very good at mirroring emotion. ... they absorb the energy, they feel it... and they mirror it. So, if a person comes in who is fearful or bossy, or pushy, you will often see it in horses. That's why we're looking at the horses all the time. We may not see it in the person, but the horse will see it. And so we look at the horse. They tell us a lot about what's going on in a person.

Building on the horses' natural characteristics and behaviours, Dolly attributed the success and effects of EAP to the horses' physical traits associated with their prey drives, saying that their power and vulnerability helped clients 'open up' and be more vulnerable during the EAP session:

I think it's a combination of two things in particular, the incredible potential for power that the horses have, their large size, their potential for power and energy, but at the same time, their vulnerability and their ability to be protective. And there's something about that potential for power and vulnerability, that for a person who is vulnerable and who has trauma or has issues trusting, that those two things combined with that horse, they feel instantly safe, and in an environment where they're able to, you know, it just creates that safe space. And then I think it's that power and vulnerability combination that, that horses just naturally have.

Interestingly, and though gender norms are beyond the scope of this project, Dolly also mentioned the importance of the horse's size and vulnerability that enabled men, particularly those in service roles like policing or the military, to be vulnerable and share their emotions and past experiences without judgement.

Being attuned to the horses' prey drives also meant that some EAP clinicians were aware of their horses' need to be in open spaces during the EAP session, usually with freedom of movement (typically in an outdoor paddock or a covered arena), and that their horses felt their best and safest when they were part of a herd with other horses. This herd component is important for how different EAP clinicians thought about what their horses needed to satisfy their wellbeing, safety, and comfort. Notably, all of the EAP clinicians I spoke with addressed issues of the freedom, safety, and wellbeing of their horses in some way, assuring me that their

horses were cared for and that all of their needs were met. Each clinician's understanding of their horses' needs differed slightly from one professional to another – some clinicians stressed the importance of things like freedom of refusal (ability to decline an invitation to participate in an EAP session) or the ability to live as horses had evolved to (being in an outdoor paddock 24/7, living as part of a large herd), while others focused on the potential for horses to remain safe during EAP sessions where they might pick up on the intense emotions of the clients involved.

While this constant return to the horse's biology and prey animal programming made sense, I also couldn't shake the feeling that it was somewhat reductive. A significant part of posthumanist and critical animal studies theory is about recognizing each animal's individuality, agency, and subjectivity – something that, in discussions about predetermined characteristics and prey drives, seemed to feel a bit flattened. Calarco (2015) raises the issue of biologism, or an attempt to understand living beings from a “strictly and reductively biological viewpoint” (pg. 52) at the expense of other vantages that, following an animal indistinction approach, leaves much to be desired. Most clinicians did indeed move beyond these species-specific characteristics to consider some of the more unique traits and quirks that made their horses helpful (or not) within the EAP session, and biology is no doubt important in understanding animal life; however, moving beyond this perspective is essential to uphold more nuanced understandings of horses and humans.

### ***Horse-Specific Characteristics***

In addition to overall species characteristics, such as the horses' prey drives and mirroring behaviours, many EAP clinicians also addressed the unique characteristics and personalities of their horses. In some ways, they spoke of their horses as if they were people – I found this personification interesting, as it is something that I found myself doing when I talk

about or try to describe the horses that I have known closely in my own life. The EAP clinicians acknowledged that their horses bring their unique personalities with them into the EAP session, and so they would often make choices regarding which horses to introduce to certain clients based on what they are experiencing or certain activities they wished to lead, or how a horse's characteristics would play out with certain clients. For instance, Paulina told me about a time she was working with a younger client who was experiencing some challenges with being assertive and was trying to help them with their shyness:

I had one girl who was so nonverbal. Week after week in my office, I couldn't get her to talk, we would sit there for a whole hour and she would never talk. I thought 'Okay, this isn't working.' So, we went out to the horses, and she didn't know what to do with them. She was very nervous and very scared. But all of her sessions were about learning how to be assertive and push the horse and move the horse and there were a few times we took the horse out of the arena, and she took the horse for a walk and that horse was the most stubborn horse. He would dig his hooves in and he did not want to go down the driveway. She persisted and she pushed and she pushed and she pushed and she made him do it. And at the end I said, 'So what happened out there?' and she goes, 'Assertiveness takes a lot of energy!' [laughs]. That's a good lesson to learn, it sure does!

For Paulina, it made sense to pair her shy client with a more stubborn horse to help curate a beneficial therapeutic experience. Another participant, Martina, told me about a certain activity she was doing with a client who was trying to work through a feeling of overwhelm about their life circumstances. Knowing that the horse she had invited into the session was curious and adept

at maneuvering physical obstacles, she invited the client to let the horse explore a pile of poles with her to represent the feeling of overwhelm and how to approach barriers and daunting tasks.

As Martina explained:

I had one client recently who wanted to work on just general feelings of overwhelm that were coming up for them... So, I asked my client to make something in the arena that represented their feelings of overwhelm. So they took some poles and just made like a big, messy pile, poles were on top of each other, and diagonal and all this stuff. And this is a time when me knowing the horses was really important, because what I asked the client to do was just allow [Martina's horse] to go and explore the mess of poles... And [Martina's horse] is like a little mountain goat, like I've seen him climb things before. So I just like, I know him. If he doesn't want to do anything, he won't. If he does end up climbing the poles, he's gonna be fine, right?... And then the client was able to talk about how [Martina's horse] experienced the overwhelm.

Possessing an intimate knowledge of the characteristics and personalities of their horses is seemingly a requisite qualification for a successful EAP session, with some participants, such as Carrie, even stating that she would not feel comfortable leading an EAP session with a horse that she does not know well or had only recently brought into her practice.

While the horses themselves did not obtain social work or clinical psychology degrees, the EAP clinicians I spoke with often referenced their natural characteristics that made them appropriate psychotherapists: characteristics like being non-judgemental, accepting, non-verbal, emotive, curious, sensitive, and receptive. Phoebe referenced a number of these ideas as she explained why horses are effective in the EAP relationship:

[The horse] is not someone that's gonna say, 'Stop having that thought, stop thinking like that, stop doing this, stop doing that.' And they really have that source and that outlet to just, you know, sit there petting a horse and tell all their secrets, and not be told what they need to do or what they're doing wrong or anything like that.

After clarifying what characteristics make horses good for psychotherapy, I tried to follow up by asking what the "ideal" EAP horse would be like. Some clinicians conceded that as long as a horse was healthy and did not pose a danger to the clients, they would make a good therapy horse. Others were more specific in their idea of an ideal EAP horse: horses that elicit emotions, push boundaries, are bold, stubborn, or assertive. These descriptors tended to reference the characteristics of individual horses who clinicians had worked with, with one participant stating she would not trust some of her non-working horses to be good EAP horses. For instance, Carrie described the relationships she has had with various horses in her practice, starting with the horse she purchased as a teenager and cared for throughout her life as a student, social worker, professional psychotherapist and as a mother. In contrast to this was one of the horses she uses for leisure riding, who would not be a good fit for therapy, and a horse she had recently purchased that has all the markings of a good EAP horse and leisure riding horse:

He's very playful. He's very curious. He will let seven-year-olds, you know, just pull him around. So he's pretty solid as a therapy horse. He's also going to be my riding horse, is my riding horse. But it's interesting how that relationship is coming along.

In contrast, Martina offered the following description of a good therapy horse, stressing the importance of the horse's ability to set boundaries, be safe around clients, and their innate honesty:

I would say that a good equine therapy horse is one who knows how to set boundaries, right? Like most of the horses do. But someone who... well, they're all like this, they're all honest, right? They all tell us what is going on with them and what isn't, right? So I guess that someone that I can trust is going to be safe doing so. But it's still helpful to have a wide range of spookiness levels or a wide range of personalities.

For Brenda, a good therapy horse was a sensitive horse, but not too sensitive – they have to be able to adapt to changes and not quick to scare:

A therapy horse that's great is highly sensitive, they have to be pretty grounded, meaning you have certain horses that are flightier than others. They can withstand a lot of changes or they're not as spooky. I find for my own comfort, I like horses that are less spooky. So they're able to meet a new situation and quickly adjust to it and feel safe and be able to go through it. That to me makes a good therapy horse. I don't think age makes a difference. I think it has to do with the ability to be grounded, brave, strong, and not as flighty.

Following Brenda's understanding, Noreen described how good leisure riding horses are not necessarily good therapy horses:

My original horse is not... he's not a great riding horse, but he's an excellent equine therapy horse, because he is so sensitive. He's one of my best horses. You know, some horses, as I said previously, some horses might be too high



energy for a client. So you know, horses have personalities, some horses, just as some people are suited for certain roles, some horses are better suited for certain activities than others.

This was a theme that emerged throughout many of the EAP interviews, which highlighted how characteristics of good riding horses tended to, at times, be at odds with the characteristics of good EAP horses. The main difference, it seemed, was the horses' ability to express their boundaries and advocate for their needs, which would typically be undesirable in a leisure riding setting. This seemed to follow a parallel with EAP clients, too – a number of EAP clinicians I spoke with mentioned that although leisure riders may benefit from the talk therapy component of EAP, the horse-human relationship either wouldn't be as impactful for them as they already know what it is like to be around horses and in relationship with them, or because they would have to unlearn a lot of their assumptions about how a horse should behave from their previous riding experience. By focusing on respecting the identity of the horses with which the EAP clinicians work, the horse-human relationship in EAP is qualitatively different from the relationship in most leisure riding scenarios. Though many leisure riders would likely characterize the relationship they share with their horses to be one of partnership, there is an expectation of obedience or domination in leisure riding that is particularly problematic in EAP. Accordingly, Phoebe was firmly opposed to her clients who do mounted work treating the session like a riding lesson:

Even if I'm doing mounted work with the client, which I sometimes will do, that horse is then their partner, they're working in unison with the horse as their partner not, you know, 'I'm getting on and I'm kicking this horse and jumping over a course of jumps and different things and learning how...', that's the other

thing is that I'm not teaching the client how to ride, you're not getting on the horse to ride, we're getting on this horse and we're learning to slow our breathing, and follow the rhythm of the movement and really work on those sorts of things.

It seemed that through the course of the interviews, clinicians tended to be of two minds regarding the role of the horse and how they factor into the EAP sessions and experience. The majority of clinicians I spoke with discussed a more anthropomorphised understanding of the horse's role in EAP, which took at least one of the following forms: horse-as-teacher, horse-as-healer, horse-as-friend, and horse-as-co-worker. Their perspective thus aligned more closely with the animal identity approach as they preferred to bring horses into a more humanlike recognition of rights and respect. However, a minority of the clinicians I spoke with thought that the horse's only role in the EAP session was to simply 'be a horse.' These clinicians also tended to have a more naturalistic view of why horses are good at EAP, and what it means to meet a horse's needs and care for them properly. These clinicians tended to believe that their horses would take care of themselves, and that being a part of EAP meant that they would be their "true, authentic selves" without any sort of fulfilment of a certain role or predetermined identity. These clinicians aligned most closely with the difference approach to animal rights and justice, preferring to recognize the value and uniqueness of their horses without relying on a likeness to humans.

From here, I refer to the more anthropomorphized designations as *more-than-horse*, and the more naturalistic, less anthropomorphized designations as *just-horse*. In the section that follows, I will first discuss the perspectives of the EAP clinicians who understand their EAP horses as more-than-horse, with an attention to issues like labour rights of animals and other important perspectives from the critical animal studies scholarship, and some general insights

into the value of anthropomorphising for the horses doing this work. I contrast this perspective against the clinicians who think of the role of their horses as just-horse. My goal is not to position one approach or perspective as ‘better’ or more ethical than the other. Rather, I want to explore how the EAP clinician’s perspectives and EAP philosophy affects their overall approach to the work and the way they bring their horses into EAP sessions.

### **More-than-Horse: Establishing Animal Identity in EAP**

The lines of demarcation between humans and animals are not as clear as they would appear; this is demonstrated by the accounts of EAP clinicians who talk about their horses as friends, helpers, healers and teachers, each with distinct personalities and unique histories. Taylor and Hamilton write that the personhood of animals is “created for those unable to establish it for themselves” (2013, pg. 96), a process whereby animal owners attribute personhood to their animals by assigning meaning to specific characteristics and personality traits. These characteristics (which are often anthropocentric) could indeed belong to the wide array of ways in which animals naturally express themselves and behave; however, when understood by the human owners with whom they share intimate spaces and experiences, they take on more significant meanings. For example, if a companion animal such as a dog or a cat expresses their weariness of strangers, their caretakers could come to think of them as ‘shy’, rather than exhibiting normal behaviours associated with their species. These sorts of personalizing characteristics came up often in my interviews with EAP clinicians who attributed the success of EAP sessions to their horses’ abilities to accept various non-horse roles. By attributing human-like characteristics to the horses they work with, the EAP clinicians effectively started to blur the messy, constantly shifting species boundaries during the shared world of the EAP session. It is clear that the way personhood is assigned closely follows

Calarco's ethic of identity: by outlining their horses' subjectivity, sentience and intentionality, EAP clinicians effectively anthropomorphize their horses and offer them value and recognition by aligning them with humans.

Some participants mentioned their horses' unique needs and ways of engaging in relationships. I interpret this as a way of establishing their horses' distinctive identities, with Carrie even comparing one of her horse's behaviours to those of her children. These brief excerpts of Carrie's descriptions of her horses' qualities and characteristics are only a sample of our conversation; each horse she discussed was entirely unique and separate from the others, and she had different relationships with each of them. For Carrie, it was only possible to share these sorts of relationships with her horses by first establishing their unique identities:

So, I will say that all of my horses are good therapy horses, because they all have different needs. And they all present themselves differently in a relationship. It's because like, my daughter, too, will constantly push my buttons and push and have boundaries, and I just get exhausted. So when I go to the barn, I'm like, 'You need to stop. Don't give me nasty faces, get over yourself.' So I know, 'Okay, that's about you. He just needs something else.'

...And I know for [Carrie's horse], [he] doesn't like a lot of people. People don't know that, but I know that [he] doesn't like people. There's a few people. He likes me, he loved [Carrie's late horse], he likes my husband, he likes the farrier, you know, like, his circle is very small. So that's interesting too, how that plays out in a therapy environment.

Martina echoed Carrie's thoughts, explaining how she knows the horses in her practice well since they have worked together for so long:

All the horses that I work with, I've known for... some of them are newer, like known for a couple of years. Most of the ones that I'm bringing in I've known for like, 10 years. So I have a really good understanding of their personality, their wants and needs, I know which ones are afraid of tarps, and which ones are afraid of pylons. And you know, I kind of know all their little things that make them who they are. And that's a really important thing to know in terms of safety, right?

Likewise, Cherise expressed how communication between her clients and her horse tends to improve over time as they each get to know each other better. By highlighting the process of learning more about each other and working on their relationship, Cherise demonstrates her understanding of her horse's subjectivity and intentionality in the horse-human relationship:

[The communication] usually just gets better. It gets better because they don't know each other at first, right? So my horse knows when it's a person that she's meeting for the first time. She's an old horse, she's 30. So that's like a 90-something year old person. She's a three-quarter Arab, so she's got some energy and attitude, you know [laughs], but she's very gentle. And so she'll know when it's a new person. She's very good. And she'll be very gentle and very calm. And then she knows when it's a person she's met before, like [client], if they contact you, they've been doing sort of monthly sessions with me for a year or more now. And so she knows them, and I know, I can tell she knows them. Like, she's kind of rubbing her head on him and like, swishing her tail like, 'Oh, here's [client] again,' right? And that creates a sense of happiness in the person, like,

‘Oh, this animal cares about me.’ Especially for people who have trauma issues or abandonment issues, that’s important for them.

As well, Noreen worked to describe how each horse shows up to EAP sessions differently depending on their personalities and life experience, recognizing the horse as a being with a unique past and characteristics that can come to bear on the horse-human relationship:

They have their own stories, sometimes the horse’s story is important. They have personalities, their personalities come out, we are drawn to certain kinds of personalities. So, you know, a horse is a living, breathing, thinking, responding being that is, you know, part of our universe. And so, you know, this work invites us to see them as partners, not necessarily as tools, and they are an engaged part of the [EAP] process.

Noreen’s attention to her horse’s subjectivity is particularly important, as she explicitly avoids understanding her horses as tools in the EAP process but instead as living beings with certain capabilities that mindfully engage with humans.

### ***Establishing Worker Identity in EAP***

Following the horse-as-therapist language identified in the beginning of this section, the majority of EAP clinicians talked about their horses’ involvement in EAP as workers taking on various roles: being helpers, teachers, healers, or therapists. This worker identity was often established after discussing the horse’s unique personalities or characteristics and stands as a separate but often related identity that is constantly being negotiated, depending on the time, space, and context of the interaction. The language of horse-as-worker often started with an acknowledgement of the horse’s importance within the EAP session. For instance, Carrie described the horses as helpers and teachers in EAP:

How do I understand their role in therapy? I say that they are helpers, they are helpers in therapy, and they are here for you. And they are going to help us. And I really strongly believe in this idea of partnership. And I have to watch myself too, because I know that comes from equestrian training, right? I really believe in this. Okay, we're partners, they're our partners in therapy. They're gonna help us, they're gonna teach us. I say that a lot to them, like they're gonna teach us.

For Cherise, the horse assumes the role of a therapist that is aware of the work they are doing within an EAP session:

There is an animal involved and an integral part of the therapy, like one of the things was really important to me in the training that I took learning equine therapy was that the horse is equally as important as me and the client, it's not a tool we're using, the horse is part of the therapy. They are a therapist, and my horse is really good. She sort of knows what we're doing at work.

Similarly, Noreen recognized the horse's role as a member of the therapeutic team. She reflected on how the centering of the horse within the team can be surprising to clients and helps them open themselves up to vulnerability and change:

The horse is part of the team. In equine therapy, the horse has a role, the horse creates an opening for the client in a way that talk therapy... You know, talk therapy can do that as well, but maybe not in a way that sometimes is profoundly opening and changing and unexpected. I think part of the benefit of working with horses is people have different perceptions of how the animal is going to, you know, what the animal is about, some people have a fear of horses. So when the horse actually responds, as you know, a sentient being that has a mind of its

own, that has choice, that sometimes is surprising to the client. It is the surprise, it's that element of surprise that often creates the opening for change that talk therapy, you know... it can be a longer process than equine therapy.

According to the EAP clinicians, the horse's importance in the sessions often equaled theirs as a psychotherapist. Phoebe explained this by centering the horse as a therapist in their own right:

... I feel like when you have a horse in [the EAP session], the horse kind of almost becomes a therapist as well. And they're able to talk to that horse, and you might still be there and ask some questions, or I've had sessions where I didn't talk to the client barely at all, and I just let them talk to the horse and I was there listening...

...I'll say I always use them though as they're like my partner, like they're, they are typically in my sessions. They're not a horse that you're jumping on and riding. They are, you know, as much a part of the session as I am.

Dolly specifically stated that the horses she works with are even more important than she is, as a therapist, in the EAP setting:

I like to say, and I say this quite often, and you can quote me on this. I've said to people that I really believe that the horses are truly the therapists in the session. And I'm just taking notes, I'm really just, you know, there, facilitating, but the horses really are the true therapists. They have the magic.

This recognition of the horse's role as a worker tended to translate into how the EAP clinicians treated their horses, particularly when it came to their willingness to work and the clinicians'



openness to allow their horses time to rest and recover. Amie explicitly stated that she treats her horses like her employees:

...I treat my horses appropriately like I do my employees, they may not be ready to work or they may need to come and warm up or do different things before they're ready to do that type of work or want to interact with others.

Likewise, Dolly drew attention to the work that she asks her horses to do, focusing on the importance of respecting their boundaries and allowing them the opportunity to refuse work:

I don't think I've ever required a horse to do anything they didn't already want to do. It's all about respect, we typically say that the only rule that we really have here is respect. And it's respecting everybody's boundaries, respecting the process. With that in mind, there's an understanding that we would never ask a horse to do anything. The horses are at liberty for the most part, I mean, there are times where if we're doing an activity, and the person decides that picking up a rope, or a halter as a communication tool would be helpful, then they can do that. That's about the extent of it. You know, we wouldn't be asking a horse to do anything more than that, to be led by a halter.

Upon establishing the horse's identity as a worker, particularly with clients, certain therapists (whose home barn was large enough to accommodate riding lessons) even stated that they would not let their clients, were they to take riding lessons, use the same horses that they had built a relationship with in EAP, particularly if they happened to incorporate mounted work in their sessions. As Phoebe elaborated:

...we're here, and maybe they're going to come for recreational riding at some other point, because we do offer that as well. But again, I would then also make

that disconnect. And I would say, 'I probably will not teach you recreational riding lessons, I'm going to set you up with one of our other instructors, because I want to keep myself separate from your recreational piece.' And same with the horse too, depending, again, on client and situation, I may say, 'You know, when this client rides, they're not to ride this horse, because that's a horse they're using in therapy as their partner.' Different things, you know, they're not getting on and riding that horse seriously... there are some instances where I've said, you know, 'We've worked so hard to build that foundation with the horse as in a therapy [equine-facilitated wellness] setting, that I wouldn't want to jeopardize that relationship between the horse or the person by having them get on and be, you know, essentially telling the horse what the horse has to do.'

While the psychotherapists I interviewed were quick to classify their horses as workers and recognize the importance of their general ability to go along with the work, it was less clear what kind of labour they did in the EAP session to warrant their title. This poses a challenge not just in terms of how the work of the horses in EAP is conceptualized, but also for improving their work lives. Despite the common explanations of the horses being good therapists due to their personalities or biological traits, and despite the repeated insistence that the horses are key components of the EAP session, most psychotherapists didn't seem to elaborate on the horse's work beyond their willingness or unwillingness to participate in the EAP sessions. Porcher (in Despret, 2016) argues that an animal's labour is typically only highly visible in poor working environments, thus the fact that they do work may be recognized while the components of their work remain elusive. It seemed that although psychotherapists had no problem recognizing the importance of their horses in the sessions, this importance seemed to stem only from how the

horses would naturally behave in their relationships with other humans. I think the common insistence of the horse-as-worker originated from a desire to properly recognize the identity of their horses by focusing on the sentience, subjectivity, and intentionality they observed in the EAP setting. In the ethos of the identity approach, the EAP clinicians were able to offer their horses certain rights and freedoms typically associated with humans, but not other animals – as such, they can pull their horses into the shared world of EAP professional recognition and respect, blurring species boundaries *safely*, or without sacrificing their own human legitimacy in the careful process of demarcating lines between horses and humans. While it is important to understand how these EAP clinicians conceptualize the identity of their horses, what sorts of effects does this have on their overall relationships and approaches toward EAP and other horses?

### ***Clinicians' Approach to EAP***

Returning to the introduction of this section, I am primarily concerned with how the identities assigned to the horses by their human handlers affected their lives and the clinicians' overall approaches to their work and EAP sessions. It is one thing to claim that the horses are a significant and central part of EAP, worthy of respect and care, but how does this discourse actually translate to the lived realities of the equine healers, teachers, helpers and friends? For some clinicians, like Phoebe, who had maintained close relationships with horses throughout their lives, their awareness of the horses' needs led them to respect their horses' boundaries and life outside of EAP sessions:

But it's also affected how I look at how other people care for the horses, and what sorts of bonds and different things they have with their horses, because I am very much and I've always, even before I started working with them

professionally, I very much like ground-based [work with horses], love working on foundation stuff. I love just spending time with them... I could go out and spend three hours just sitting in the field with the horses, and I'd be quite happy not to ride. But then for me to see other people that you know, go up and ride their horses for three hours, and then throw them in the field and don't do anything with them or visit with them. It's frustrating to me, if that makes sense. But even more so now that I work with them professionally, because I'm like, they need that mental break, too. And even being in their field to be a horse and not having humans in there too. And being able to recognize when they need space too, I think it's really important... Now I have those boundaries with them. Like, you know what, this is their home. They can't get away from us if we're in their field 24/7 or even for hours, there's no escape for them. So making sure they have that, that mental break.

Phoebe expressed a profound awareness of the power imbalance in the horse-human relationship as well, citing the horse's inability to escape humans and retreat to the herd should they grow tired of interacting with them.

For some participants, such as Paulina, the horse's identity as a therapist (and thus as a co-worker) had significant implications for how she mentally reconciles the relationship she has to leisure riding or mounted work, tying back to the earlier theme of the differences in respect between leisure riding relationships and EAP relationships:

No, [Paulina's relationship with horses] really feels different for me now... But I think that, for me, just being with them and engaging with them in a therapeutic way has really built trust in the relationship with herds themselves that would

not be there if we just used them for mounted work. If they feel a difference, I don't know, I may just be projecting that on them...

Paulina continued, stating that she can't claim to know what the horses she works with think or feel about the EAP work they are expected to do:

...I mean, this is my theory, but who knows that they think or feel. But yeah, it is kind of funny, you know, because it does change how you relate to them, how you interact with them. And I would just get so proud of them for, when working with people and seeing groups and people, you know, moving them and making them do things and the horses really wanting to do stuff, you know, and a session will be over and I'll go, 'Oh man, that was such a good job, you just knew what was going on,' like, you're just so excited to see that they're naturally social beings and they want to engage and they want to connect and they want, for the most part, to please and be useful... It's funny, because it's like they have an internal clock when the hour comes to the end. It's like they know the hour is up. They're just over by the gate, 'Time's up!'

This intimacy and respect for her horses came to affect the way Paulina related to leisure riding, though she continued to do so; it seemed that this was an uncommon perspective within her circle of colleagues:

When I'm really doing a lot of this kind of work, the horses become such a valuable team member, we call them our team members, that they're part of the therapeutic team. And there's an equality... I was telling somebody at one of our training events, I go, 'I almost feel like I'm apologizing for putting a saddle on them and a bit in their mouth, because I wouldn't do that to my other team

member who is facilitating with me,' I said, 'it changes the dynamic in a way,' you know, because I said, 'there is equality and this mutual respect.' And the horses know, my horses know, that when they go down in that arena, and they're in there by themselves, they can run around and be crazy and do what they want.

But as soon as a human steps in there, they know it's time to work.

Paulina's comment about her experience working with EAP horses altering her relationship with leisure riding closely approximates Calarco's ethic of indifference. By seeing her horses as co-workers in a very serious way, she is called on to question the way she has related to horses throughout her life. Paulina still takes an animal identity approach, as she maintains an anthropocentric logic in how she pulls the horse into the human realm as a co-worker, but manages to complicate some of the foundational power relations of a typical human-horse leisure and working relationship.

Overall, there seemed to be an awareness among clinicians that by recognizing their horses as workers, they also had to respect the horse's other identities assumed outside of working hours by giving them time to just "be a horse" or even question their relationship to leisure riding. For Jocelyne Porcher (in Despret, 2016, pg. 178), recognizing animals as workers also "obliges one to consider animals as other than victims or natural and cultural idiots that need to be liberated despite themselves." Recognizing horses as workers, then, requires us to consider the horses as sentient, subjective, intentional beings that willfully participate in the work of EAP in a relationship that does not have to be exploitative. I also see many elements of Coulter's conditions for 'humane jobs' in the ways that clinicians approached their working relationships with EAP horses, by approaching the horse-human working relationship from a foundation of respect and care. Through this lens, it is clear to see how working conditions for animals can be

improved by modelling them off of already existing protections and regulations for human workers. Amie made this clear when she stated that she treats her EAP horses like she does her employees, by giving them time off and a break when needed. Phoebe also demonstrates this in her comment about the importance of ensuring her horses have good lives outside of work, fulfilling some of Coulter's criteria for humane jobs. Overall, I would argue that this understanding of ensuring good working conditions for their horses most closely resembles the experiences described by the EAP clinicians I spoke with. The challenge in recognizing work with EAP horses is that the work of animals is often invisible except in places with a lot of mistreatment of humans and animals (Porcher in Despret, 2016); however, examining instances where EAP horses have refused work or participation in an EAP session shows us that when all is running smoothly in the EAP encounter, it is because of the active investment on the part of the horses.

### **Just-Horse**

In contrast to the clinicians who thought of their horses as workers in the EAP session, three EAP clinicians thought that the horses assumed a just-horse role in the therapy setting. This perspective emphasizes the horses' natural characteristics and individual personalities that shape how they engage with others in their horse-human relationships. Martina shared that the horse's role in EAP is just to be themselves:

Yeah, the horse is just to be a horse, it's to be themselves. Like horses are inherently honest, right? They don't have the things that get in the way of humans sometimes where we overthink or make stories about things and stuff. They just, if they want something, they're gonna let you know. And if they're experiencing an emotion, they're going to experience that emotion. Right? So

yeah, their role is really to just be themselves. Which is that honest, true self, right?

Brenda and Julie tended to take a more 'radical' approach in their understandings of horse freedom and wellbeing, which centered on honouring their horses' natural instincts and respecting the needs of their horses that have resulted from their evolution as prey animals, such as having access to lots of open space and not being kept inside a stall for the majority of the day. Julie stated in her interview that the entire system of horse barns should be revisited to allow horses to have free movement and access to other horses and the outdoors. Brenda was especially passionate about this:

So the way I do the work, it's the same as when I was a child, like, my horses are not kept indoors at all. They're not put in stalls in the evening. They're all outside 24/7, winter, summer, fall and spring, all their needs are met. Because when you have a horse that's doing therapy, you really need to make sure all their needs are met, like friends, open space, food, fresh clean warm water. Because if you keep a horse locked up for 16 hours, and it has certain behavioural issues, it makes a horse not as receptive, really, not in tune with people, because they're kind of always in fear or thinking they're going to get punished. So I don't work with horses in that way.

Brenda, who had close relationships with horses throughout her childhood, really strongly believed in the idea that horses can be part of the therapeutic process, but that the client is capable of and responsible for healing themselves. Her understanding used to be more aligned with the more-than-horse approach outlined above, but she has since changed her mind:



A lot of people have mentioned that the horse is a healer. And lately, I've thought to myself, I'm not so sure that's something I would say. Where we actually put such pressure on the horses healing us. That's a huge responsibility. And I realized that for me, it's not so much that I'm healing my client or the horse is healing the client. I think for me, the most important thing is that the client realizes that they are their own healers for themselves. And to be really aware and know their own power of who they are. And I think for me, just like the power in being with a horse, I feel that clients need to know just how amazing they are and how powerful they are. And that they can heal themselves... Yeah, the horse may be the conduit for the healing, maybe it is for them, and offering deeper awareness and perhaps growing their own strength, their own courage comes through, dealing with their own fears and working through it. The horse may be your partner in that and may be your friend or your, just that energy, but it's certainly not the healer. I thought that before in the early years, but lately I've changed my mind on that.

Julie echoed Brenda's sentiments, stating that "their role is just to be horses. I'm not asking, I'm not trying to take out or add anything. I definitely work with horses that I have a comfort and ease with... what I'm learning over the years is it's not about trying to fit a horse with some human-based activity." Julie continued, explaining that the horse's participation in the therapeutic session is not about what they are doing or not doing to help the client, but rather, what the facilitators or the clinicians are failing to do to support the horses and humans involved. This refusal to pin responsibility for properly healing or carrying out a session on the horses

involved in EAP is a surprisingly unique approach that did not seem to arise in my other interviews. As Julie described:

I'm aware that, I believe it's more about the facilitator. It's not what the horse is not doing. It's what are we not setting up, or providing? So it's like putting the square peg in the round hole, you know. Who am I to say that a horse must do this in a sequence? People are not like that, we cannot be in relationship exactly the same with everybody, we have to have different entry points.

Following the different ethical perspectives outlined by Calarco (2015), I argue that the psychotherapists here subscribe to the ethic of difference – that is, they recognize the uniqueness and variety within both horses and humans and focus on the differences of their horses in their understanding of what a horse needs to be treated well and cared for properly. Part of this is recognizing that their horses deserve respect regardless of whether they are given an identity to fill, and that horses have different needs and ways of communicating than humans do. These participants also expressed a profound awareness of the impossibility of knowing what their horses think or feel – as the humans that know them closely can try to guess and make their best-informed assumptions, but they shared a humility that reminded me of Derrida's reflections on his now-famous cat: his cat existed on her own prior to him seeing her and being responded to, implying an inner-world of subjectivity that Derrida himself was not privy to. Not only did the therapists here refuse to anthropomorphize the actions and behaviours of their horses in the EAP session, but they refused to flatten their existence to a work-related identity.

### **Moving from Animal Identity and Difference to Animal Indistinction in EAP**

Following the identity approach to animal ethics, most EAP clinicians tended to offer their horses certain human-like and work-related identities that validated their position in the

EAP session and rewarded them with rights and freedoms in the shared world of EAP. This approach is beneficial for the horses who are capable of demonstrating sentience, subjectivity and intentionality, but does little to shift the perceptions of animals or other humans that do not fulfill such criteria, and this perspective still takes human-centeredness for granted without seeking to disrupt most traditional power dynamics between the horses and the humans. The difference approach to animal ethics offers a slightly more radical view of animal rights and freedoms that do not hinge on the horse's ability to perform traditionally human-like roles and responsibilities, yet the focus on differences between and within horses and humans can distract from the posthumanist goal of a shifting of our considerations that shares concern with humans and animals more equally.

By adopting the indistinction approach to animal ethics, which seeks to de-center the human entirely to instead focus on the ways in which we embrace animality, we can widen the scope of freedoms and liberation to better re-think our human-animal relationships, including those in EAP. To some extent, this is already happening – a number of clinicians I interviewed spoke about how their horses can act as models in the EAP session for their clients to learn from and relate to. Because the horses have prey responses that result in a heightened awareness of their environment and ability to read others' energies and emotions, EAP clients tended to relate to the horses. Some clinicians identified their horses as models of emotional regulation and wellbeing for these clients, effectively animalizing their human clients and humanizing their equine partners. Brenda talked about how her clients working with trauma and PTSD relate to the horses' flight response:

The horses are just so patient and loving and not, you know, not judging you or not... they don't work in 'good' or 'bad', they're always just feeling things.

They don't think, they're in the moment, right. And they assess whatever the dangers are. They have the flight response that some, a lot of trauma people, they relate to that...

... So as I describe the horses, a lot of clients start to relate to that, 'That really feels like me,' because we were talking about trauma, or we're talking about how they form relationships, what relationships feel safe for them. So I feel like, being around the horse for a lot of them feels safe, they can connect and they relate.

Carrie also referenced her horses' ability to "read the energy" of the moment and keep themselves safe as a model of what trauma survivors might be working toward:

I think their uncanny ability to kind of, they sort of read the energy. And they can kind of read the moment, and then adjust to what suits them. And how to keep themselves safe. So isn't that what we want our trauma survivors to be able to do, right, in some capacity? So I think there's that piece. And I think there's this unconditional kind of, I don't want to say love, but I want to say, like, they don't have judgements.

Following Carrie's comment about horses being attuned to their environments as a way of keeping themselves safe, Cherise extended the horses' need for safety to their need for trusting relationships. Cherise uses this as a starting point for her clients, likening the insecurity and vulnerability that they, as humans, may feel in their daily lives to the horses. The horse's and human's shared need for trust also functions as a way of building a bond between the human client and the horse:

I also talk a lot about trust, that there has to be trust, the horse isn't going to do anything you ask it to do if it doesn't trust you, because they are prey animals, because they need to feel safe. So it gives a lot of opportunity to bring that up. And I work with a lot of people who are trauma victims and PTSD, and so they have major trust issues. They don't feel safe in their world and their environment. They're very on guard and vigilant. So I say, 'Well the horse is like that too. Like, they're always aware, if they don't feel safe with you they're just gonna walk away from you. So, let's let that sort of make a connection between you. The horse is like you in that way, right?'

By identifying certain evolutionary traits in horses, such as their prey drive and constant alertness, while tying these traits to certain human experiences such as PTSD, trauma, and anxiety, the EAP clinicians quoted above effectively blurred the lines between the horse and human species boundaries and pulled the human into the realm of the animal.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have reviewed three main approaches to animal ethics that characterize the accounts of my EAP clinicians: identity, difference, and indistinction. As the animal identity approach arose most frequently in my interviews, this is the perspective to which I have devoted the majority of my analysis. It is this approach that helps to make sense of my more-than-horse or horse-as-worker analysis – by assigning the worker identity to their horses, EAP clinicians both validated the work their horses do in the EAP session, recognized their sentience, subjectivity and intentionality, and consciously extended various freedoms or rights to their horses on the basis of this identity, such as the freedom to refuse work or the right to just “be a horse” in their off-hours. While this sort of perspective is incredibly important for the horses

involved in EAP and for how the clinicians approached their care and overall relationship, it does little to advance the freedoms of animals not recognized by this still-humancentric method of distinction.

The animal difference approach, aligned with the accounts of a few of my participants, is concerned mostly with the acknowledgement and appreciation of the differences and variety that exist within and between species, both human and non-human. For the EAP clinicians in my study who refused to call their horses workers or anything other than a horse, they rejected the anthropomorphic tendencies of those who typically followed the identity approach. These psychotherapists mostly relied on fulfilling their horses' 'natural' needs and respecting their horses' traits and characteristics. This approach does less to uphold the centrality of the human, but still relies heavily on boundary work and lines of species demarcation. As well, this overall approach may rely heavily on biologism, or the reduction of an animal to its evolutionary characteristics.

Finally, the indistinction approach to animal ethics requires the animalizing of the human. Comments from psychotherapists about human clients identifying with the EAP horses due to shared feelings of vulnerability or trauma help illustrate this perspective, but it was not a common thread among most interviews. Part of the appeal of this perspective is how it could change our understanding of shared pleasure and meaning-making across species – indeed, the promise of 'being well together' fits snugly within many of the accounts shared by EAP clinicians. Mutual flourishing across species boundaries could call on us to ask what it is that helps both humans and animals be well – in recognizing some of these shared qualities in animals, the boundaries between humans and animals could falter and offer greater opportunities to make meaningful relationships within a greater web of human and animal mutual

dependencies. By becoming-animal, the animal also becomes something else – this is the transformative potential of an indistinction approach to animal ethics.

I want to end this chapter with a quote from Jocelyne Porcher: “We will not elevate domestic animals from their condition as beasts of burden without elevating ourselves. It doesn’t mean giving up our place on the podium; it means making space for those who helped us to ascend there. It may make us appear less big, but to my mind, we will grow.” (2014, pg. 8). Porcher’s work with dairy farmers sought to understand farmers’ perspectives on whether dairy cows work, and what it means for them and their farmers if they do. Similarly, I hope I have begun to address this pressing question in regard to EAP horses and their humans.

## Chapter 3

### The Biomedical Legitimacy of EAP

Thinking back to some of my worries at the outset of this project, one stands out among the rest: I was concerned that I wouldn't be able to recruit enough EAP participants for my study. I had originally planned on interviewing both EAP clinicians and clients and started by emailing clinicians that I had found online to see if they would be interested in getting involved. I was surprised (and incredibly relieved) when I received, almost immediately, follow-up emails of interest from most of the clinicians I had contacted. This was the moment at which I first realized how enthusiastic most EAP clinicians were to participate in the research process, a theme which would come to characterize most EAP clinicians' involvement in my project. In interview after interview, clinicians expressed how glad they were to be participating in research about their psychotherapeutic specialty, emphasizing the need for further research on EAP to help boost its image as a legitimate psychotherapeutic modality and to contribute to the knowledge base from which calls for greater funding, insurance, and accessibility are supported. Though every clinician I spoke with reiterated the biomedical legitimacy of EAP as a healing modality, most clinicians spoke with an underlying defensiveness that seemed to suggest others (either the general public or those in other health-related professions) did not take their work seriously. I found this interesting, as EAP is a biomedically legitimate and recognized form of psychotherapy. The sessions are run by psychotherapists registered with the CRPO (Certified Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario), there are a number of professional training organizations that counsel already accredited psychotherapists to work with horses in their practice (e.g., EAGALA, Tranquil Acres, and OK Corral, EQUUSOMA), and provincial and



federal governments have started to fund EAP, EAL, and EFW programming for special populations (Figure 2).

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>Funding Received</b>
Rehabilitation of Youth in Conflict with the Law, Equine Assisted Therapy Program (ON)	Government of Canada's Youth Justice Fund Initiative (2008-2011)	Unknown
The Free Spirit Therapeutic Riding Association (NS)	Veterans Affairs Canada, Veteran and Family Wellbeing Fund (2022)	\$90,000 EFW programming for women veterans
Can Praxis (AB) Breaking the Cycle Family Program	Veterans Affairs Canada, Veteran and Family Wellbeing Fund (2022)	\$456,000 EAP and EAP programming for children of veterans

*Figure 2: Government-funded EAP initiatives in Canada*

At first, I tried to make sense of the EAP clinicians' defensiveness through a lens of biomedical recognition. EAP could be considered a complementary or alternative medicine (complementary medicines being those that are offered alongside traditional biomedicine, and alternative medicines being offered in place of traditional biomedicines). It could be that by introducing a horse into the psychotherapeutic session, clinicians were subverting the norms of traditional psychotherapy and thus 'going against the grain' of biomedicine, which problematizes their positions and their work as biomedically recognized psychotherapists. Many of the EAP clinicians I spoke with re-asserted the importance of their work and its value as a legitimate form of psychotherapy, no different in its goals or orientations from the talk therapy most of their

clients were already familiar with. However, it would seem that there is more at stake: in the very same conversations where EAP clinicians were explaining the value and efficacy of EAP aligned with traditional talk therapies, a number of clinicians also worked to distance EAP from traditional talk therapies. This was often done in a more explicit way by describing how EAP can be more beneficial than talk therapies, but also by highlighting how EAP is less domineering, less judgemental, more fun, and more spiritual than traditional talk therapies. It is curious that EAP clinicians were constantly working to demonstrate the legitimacy of EAP, yet when asked about the role of their horses in EAP they often stated that the horse was like a therapist or co-worker, and that they were the ones doing the real work of EAP and were thus responsible for therapeutic successes. How is it that EAP clinicians, caught in a fight to legitimize their work, can simultaneously argue that it is not them, but their horses, who are responsible for the clinical successes of their clients?

In this chapter, I seek to better understand these seemingly contradictory ideas of EAP as biomedically legitimate yet subversive by thinking sociologically about the professionalization of psychotherapy and EAP clinicians' competing motivations in how they understand and explain their work. I argue that EAP clinicians occupy shifting positions as both biomedical authorities and subversive, holistic psychotherapeutic practitioners. EAP clinicians must align their work with traditional talk therapies to demonstrate its efficacy and to secure professional recognition, whilst simultaneously positioning themselves against traditional talk therapies in a bid to attract clients and practice the kind of psychotherapy that they feel is most efficacious. This is particularly important for their clients who are dissatisfied or have struggled to make progress in their previous experiences with talk therapy.

## **Background: Psychotherapy in Ontario**

To understand how psychotherapists and EAP practitioners are situated in the Ontario mental healthcare landscape, we first must understand the background of psychotherapy in Ontario. According to José Domene and Robinder Bedi (2013), the history of psychotherapy in Canada closely mirrored that of the United States until the 1960s, when the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) was formed. The CCPA was created to help enhance the counselling and psychotherapy professions in Canada (CCPA, 2022), part of which involves ensuring that its membership is adequately and appropriately trained in mental health therapies from accredited graduate programs. In 2007, the Ontario Provincial Government passed *The Psychotherapy Act* (Ontario, 2022), which effectively outlined certain professional requirements that a practitioner needed to obtain to be recognized as a psychotherapist, alongside four different classes of certificates of registration: Registered Psychotherapist (RP), Qualifying (RPQ), Temporary, or Inactive. The 2007 *Psychotherapy Act* was not actually in force until 2015, meaning that anyone could claim they were practicing psychotherapy without repercussions until then. As of April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015, RP or RPQ practitioners must have completed a program in psychotherapy that is approved by the CRPO, completed the registration examinations set by the Registration Committee, completed at least 450 clinical hours of direct patient contact and 100 hours of clinical supervision, and, finally, completed the jurisprudence course set by the Registration Committee no earlier than two years before the date of their application. Such stringent measures to control who can or cannot be recognized as a psychotherapist means that professional inclusion in the field is carefully monitored.

To be recognized as an EAP clinician, then, requires belonging to the CRPO, effectively guaranteeing that the practitioner has professional psychotherapeutic qualifications. Professional

colleges like the CRPO are not universal in Canada – as of 2022, only Ontario and Quebec regulate the profession of psychotherapy, with Alberta, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island regulating only counseling professions (CCPA, 2022). Despite these regulation measures, there is still a hierarchy of status and prestige among counselors and psychotherapists in Canada, particularly in terms of public perception and professional recognition (Domene & Bedi, 2013). Medical doctors and psychiatrists tend to be at the top of the professional prestige pyramid, followed by clinical psychologists, psychotherapists in medical settings, psychotherapists in other settings (such as private practice, in schools, at workplaces, etc.), and, finally, counselors with less than a graduate degree in all settings. Those working at the bottom of the pyramid (i.e., private practice psychotherapists and unaccredited counselors) tend to hold less status among their colleagues, receive less recognition for their work, and receive less compensation.

Part of the issue regarding recognition and funding lies with the vulnerability and precarity of working in a private practice – these practitioners are “at the mercy of economic market conditions and larger sociopolitical trends, some of which run antithetical to their training” (Domene & Bedi, 2013, pg. 109). One of the major challenges for private practice psychotherapists in Ontario is the billing system – only psychotherapy services offered by a physician or a psychiatrist are covered by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP), so most private practice clinicians bill through their clients’ work benefits or personal supplemental insurance plans despite offering similar psychotherapeutic services to physicians and psychiatrists. Since health insurance and benefits are variable, psychotherapy services are not universally accessible. Though the Ontario Government and CRPO have a strict regulation process for psychotherapists, no such accreditation measures exist for EAP practitioners, who

overwhelmingly work in private practice. Every clinician I spoke with elected to receive EAP training of their own accord, though this is not a requirement to practice EAP in Ontario.

### **Professionalization**

In 2015, Ontario's psychotherapists formally underwent the process of professionalization, culminating in the enforcement of *The Psychotherapy Act, 2007*. Broadly, professionalization can be understood as the process of increasing training and technical skills of workers in a certain occupation, coupled with greater requirements for recognition. One of the multiple aims of professionalization is to extend the profession's jurisdiction and retain power (Flick, 2021) – this was the case with the physician's rise to medical power and dominance in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, by expanding their scope of practice to include birth and pregnancy while simultaneously discrediting and displacing folk healers, such as midwives (Ehrenreich and English, 1979). Eliot Friedson (1970), a prominent medical sociologist, outlines the three points which form the basis of professions' claims to autonomy and the right to self-govern: first, that professions require such a vast amount of specialized skills and knowledge such that no other non-professional could effectively work in the profession; second, that professions act with discernment such that no external control or regulation by non-professionals is necessary; third, that the profession can identify and exclude those members that are not qualified, competent, or following proper ethical guidelines.

The development and recognition of *The Psychotherapy Act, 2007* fits the professionalization process and claims to a tee – practitioners are expected to be highly trained and undergo a rigorous application process before being granted the title of a Registered Psychotherapist belonging to the CRPO. Professionalization has been touted as a goal of psychotherapy and counseling governing bodies, such as the CCPA (in fact, it was one of the

core reasons for its founding). It would seem that the process of professionalization is beneficial for those occupations undergoing changes in education and regulations, as it offers those professionals greater recognition and legitimacy to continue to practice in their fields as they please. Professionalization also limits competition inside and out of a certain profession – for instance, regulatory colleges (such as the CRPO) have the institutional power to define the consequences for those who claim to practice psychotherapy without the necessary accreditations. These consequences are usually monetary and are intended to dissuade others from fraudulently claiming the title of an RP or RPQ, which would effectively dilute the perceived legitimacy of the profession. Internally, regulatory colleges have the power to define members' codes of ethics and codes of conduct. If the college were to review a practicing psychotherapist or receive a complaint warranting a review, the college may act in the best interest of the client and the profession to intervene if necessary.

Though professionalization may offer benefits to practitioners whose work is accepted as legitimate, it is not entirely positive. Stephen Timmons (2011) offers a critique of professionalization in the United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS), describing how governments wield the power to dictate professionalization and the duties of a profession on its own terms. Occupations that had been professionalized half a century ago experienced benefits that are no longer available to those that are in the process of professionalizing today; as well, certain occupations that desire to be recognized as professions may face greater barriers to being recognized as such, given the growing divide between the professional and non-professional. Additionally, some professions may wish to de-professionalize as a result of the limitations of their scope of practice, opting to distance themselves from other well-established and adjacent modes of practice. It seems that professionalization is also decreasing – Sabine Flick (2021)

analyzes the de-professionalization of psychotherapy in the contemporary West, arguing that a growing therapeutic culture has made professions other than psychotherapy proficient at understanding and offering therapy, lessening the sole claim to therapeutic services that psychotherapists may offer. As well, the economization of care presents challenges for psychotherapists to follow their training and offer ‘true’ psychotherapy – if practitioners are more concerned about the ‘bottom line’ than helping their clients, the purpose of their profession is less legitimate (Domene & Bedi, 2013). Psychotherapists are also experiencing less autonomy in their working environments – pressures of the government, as outlined by Timmons (2011), reduces the control that psychotherapists have over their own practice and the aims of their profession.

There are theoretical concerns, too, about the purpose of professionalization for certain occupations. While some see the process of professionalization as something that allows certain occupations greater autonomy and control over their practice, professionalization has in the past acted as a process to exert control over other occupations and fields of practice, levying a growing body of supportive empirical knowledge to make claims to power (Gale, 2014; Flick, 2021). To take a Foucauldian approach, the ever-growing pressure within the profession of EAP to determine what kinds of knowledge claims are legitimate could be understood as the desire to exercise and embody power through the acceptance of certain knowledges and truths. If the knowledge claims of EAP clinicians are to be taken seriously, this tells us that the field has enough power to be seen as legitimate through the lens of the Western scientific paradigm and thus can successfully make certain truth claims. These claims to knowledge and power reinforce each other in a circular process, strengthening the perceived legitimacy of the field and, thus, its ability to produce more knowledge (Foucault, 1977). Further, as EAP assumes a more powerful

status as a psychotherapeutic discipline, practitioners will invariably enter into a professional-client relationship that is even further imbued with power asymmetries and underlying normalizing forces (Foucault, 1975). In the context of EAP professionals seeking greater recognition from other biomedically recognized healthcare practitioners and the general public, this increase in professional autonomy, ability to make truth claims, and the growing chasm between EAP clinicians and their clients could very well make the field of EAP more domineering and less equitable.

### **Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy: A Complementary or Alternative Medicine?**

Complementary and Alternative Medicines (CAMs) are defined as “healthcare approaches that are not typically part of conventional medical care or that may have origins outside of usual Western medical practice” (NIH, 2021). Complementary medicines are non-mainstream approaches used alongside conventional medicines, whereas alternative medicines are non-mainstream approaches used in place of conventional medicines. Since EAP relies on the presence of and interaction with a horse (i.e., a non-traditional healthcare approach) alongside the participation of a certified RP, I argue that it occupies the status of a complementary medicine. According to Kruger and Serpell (2010), the presence of the psychotherapist lends the process biomedical legitimacy making it less “fringe” than other complementary medicines, while the presence and centrality of the horse means that it is not entirely a mainstream or traditional healthcare approach.

In order for something to be recognized as “complementary to” or “alternative”, there must be a dominant framework against which practices are compared. Biomedical dominance frames the language with which we engage with issues of health, illness, and healing (Gale, 2014), and this language reflects greater power dynamics in the naming and terminological



process. These neat definitions of complementary or alternative medicines (CAMs) are problematic as they oversimplify CAMs, mask the diversity within and between CAM practices, and suggest that there may be no similarities in practice across the CAM and biomedical binary. Further, they do not account for the fact that definitions change over time. Such neat and oversimplified definitions are part of the reason why EAP practitioners may have challenges being recognized as legitimate psychotherapists. According to Saks (1995, pg. 104), alternative medicine is a “social category,” distinguished by its “marginal position in the power relations surrounding healthcare.” Though various CAM occupations have been fighting for professional recognition (e.g., osteopathy and chiropractic), their positions as less legitimate than dominant biomedical healthcare practices have posed challenges for their professionalization, which has implications for practitioners in the terms of funding, respect, and recognition.

However, not all practitioners in various CAMs aspire to biomedical recognition – one of the primary functions of medical power is the control of bodies (Turner, 1995), such that resistance to medical power structures is also an embodied form of resistance against the dominant system. For CAM practitioners who are opposed to the unequal power relations between client and clinician in the dominant biomedical model, rejecting this biomedical legitimacy could function as a way to position their field as less authoritative, more client-led and client-centered, which takes into account the client’s autonomy and control over their own health and bodies. In mental health-related CAM fields this is especially important: clinicians routinely label clients with troublesome diagnoses that the client may disagree with or interpret their concerns in a way that discounts their experiences. Mental healthcare practitioners who oppose this philosophy towards their practice may desire to distance themselves from medical power and biomedical legitimacy.

This aspiration to legitimacy and professional recognition requires the field of EAP to embrace the dominant biomedical model that characterizes the Western healthcare paradigm. One of the underlying principles of the Western biomedical system is the separation of health and spirituality, owing to the Cartesian mind/body dualism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment project (which stipulates that the mind and body are separate domains, each amenable to change but which do not have any effect on the other). As health and life have become understood in disparate, fractured pieces, any health-related project that integrates holism and notions of spirituality inherently pushes back against the biomedical domination of Western healthcare. Spirituality is underpinned by “a holistic understanding of health and the factors that affect health, individually and collectively” (Gerhardt-Strachan, 2022), and as we will see, can involve a non-religious feeling of interconnectedness with nature, the land, and the environment, including relationships with other humans and animals.

Many EAP clinicians identified being in nature and making connections with horses to be some of the most important parts of experiencing EAP, yet this more spiritual approach seems to stand at odds with the aspirations to biomedical legitimacy and professionalization that were expressed by most clinicians. To take this more holistic, spiritual approach is to push back against the Western utilitarian ethos of materialism and exploitation, and instead recognize the inherent dignity and sanctity of life, human and animal alike (Shahjahan and Haverkos, 2011). An epistemology that takes spirituality into account could help to limit the problematic dependence on rationality, objectivism, and empiricism that is deeply embedded within Western health disciplines, knowledge production, and research. Aligned with the more holistic approach that many of my EAP participants take, a spiritual epistemology can understand emotions,

intuition, and connections that “go beyond” concrete levels of meaning (Martina, EAP clinician) to be valid and valued ways of knowing and making sense of the world.

This status of EAP as a not-wholly biomedically recognized modality has resulted in some tension among EAP clinicians that I address in the following sections. While EAP clinicians are accredited psychotherapists who predominantly work in private practice, EAP does not require any additional training, certification or regulations. Ostensibly, any accredited psychotherapist in Ontario could purchase or adopt a horse and begin offering EAP as part of their practice, though all the EAP clinicians I interviewed had received training through EAP-related programs such as EAGALA, the TA Method, OK Corral or EQUUSOMA. There is no centralized regulatory organization for EAP clinicians or professional group of practitioners that is not attached to an EAP training program. This, along with a lack of recognition from biomedical practitioners, poses a significant challenge for EAP clinicians fighting to improve both the quality and legitimacy of their specialty, particularly as it relates to how the horses are treated and cared for both during and outside of the EAP process.

In the next section, I examine how the EAP clinicians I interviewed are caught in a struggle both for and against professionalization and biomedical legitimacy. Though the desire to establish a professionalized EAP framework is strong, this is contradicted by a consistent representation of EAP as fundamentally different from and generally less oppressive than traditional talk-therapies and interactions with psychotherapists. At the heart of this tension is the epistemic conflict between EAP practitioners and the dominant Western psy-culture concerning the value of spirituality and emotion in scientific practice. As I will conclude, some of this tension can be understood within a Foucauldian approach to discourse and power relations. Foucault tells us that “...we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted

discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the one that is dominated, but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that come into play in various strategies” (Foucault, 1977, pg. 100). Within the field of EAP, seemingly contrasting discourses for and against certain aspects of professionalization are best understood by the ends they mean to reach, which may in turn help us make sense of the strategies EAP practitioners employ to reach those ends.

### **Analysis**

In this section, I will outline the EAP clinicians’ struggles with and against biomedical legitimacy. Starting with a discussion of the clinicians’ challenges with biomedical recognition, I trace their frustrations with not being seen as scientifically legitimate, the challenges this poses for receiving adequate funding from insurance agencies, and the difficulties associated with affording EAP work. From here, I share how EAP clinicians perceive the solution to these struggles as rooted in further empirical research that supports the legitimacy of EAP, which ties into some clinicians’ desires for the professional regulation of EAP and the overall professionalization of the field. Following this discussion, I contrast some of the pro-professionalization discourses with a discussion of what sets EAP apart from traditional talk therapies. Generally, EAP clinicians found that EAP works faster, is more enjoyable, and more spiritual than traditional talk therapy. Based on these comments, it seems that EAP clinicians are navigating the benefits of being recognized as a CAM alongside some of the challenges associated with not being taken as seriously as traditional talk therapy. Taken together, these discussions point to the tensions at the core of EAP compared to traditional talk therapy – what makes EAP unique and meaningful to clients and clinicians often can’t be measured by empirical

research, highlighting an epistemic failure of the traditional sciences used to better understand psychological sciences.

### **Challenges with Biomedical Recognition**

The primary frustration shared by EAP clinicians was the way they are perceived by other healthcare professionals and psychotherapists, as well as the general public. There is a persisting sentiment that EAP is not “real therapy,” or that it does not involve legitimate therapeutic components. One common misconception is that EAP consists only of spending time with horses. Paulina shared her frustration with the idea that EAP is an unstructured, unorganized excuse to pet horses:

Um, I think the thing to remember about the work is that it is process oriented. But it's also... it's not just about petting horses. This is a treatment model that's based on the client's goals within a therapeutic context. So it does have flow, we're planning sessions, we're organizing sessions, we're doing that kind of thing. The sessions are structured in a certain way, there are certain themes we look for. Sometimes there's certain activities that we can allow the client to try and do. Other times we just let the client decide what they're going to do. And we're always looking at addressing what the client goals are within the context of a therapeutic plan. So it's not just going out there and having warm fuzzies with horses.

Continuing with this thought, Paulina stressed that it's about more than having fun: “whatever happens in that arena, we're wanting to relate it to outside life. Because it's not just about having fun in there. It's about whatever is happening in here has got to translate into your life out there.” For Paulina, EAP is a serious form of therapy that just happens to involve time spent with

animals. Dolly echoed Paulina's frustrations, tying it back to her training in a well-known EAP model:

I really feel very strongly about the professional and ethical process that we go through with EAGALA. This is still psychotherapeutic counselling. It's still a therapy session. It's not fun and games, it's not riding lessons, there's absolutely no on-horse activity at all. But it's more than just, you know, an empowerment session. I mean, there's a lot we can do with it. I run women's groups and I run groups for teens and that sort of thing. But it really is psychotherapy. We just happen to have horses, you know, in our session.

In this quote, the connections between Dolly's training and frustration with a lack of recognition or understanding are clear. EAP's status as complementary or alternative medicine necessarily constructs it as something 'alternative or complementary' to dominant medical practices; therefore, it is not treated as seriously as other psychotherapeutic modalities (Gale, 2014). The general misunderstanding that EAP is adjacent to leisure riding harms these clinicians' overall reputations – this is not just damaging for their professional recognition, but also has ill effects in terms of how their work is valued (both culturally and financially).

### ***Challenges With Funding***

Since EAP clinicians are private practitioners at the mercy of market conditions and sociopolitical trends, their frustration with biomedical recognition is rooted in very material concerns about how their work is funded and whether insurance agencies are willing to pay them (Domene & Bedi, 2013). Since EAP tends to be a more expensive form of therapy, this is especially important – some models, such as EAGALA, require both an EAP practitioner as well as an equine specialist to be present in each session, which means clinicians must charge a

greater fee to ensure that both parties are adequately compensated. Paulina shared the financial challenges of offering EAP:

At the end of the day, it boils down to money. Who's making it work, how are they doing it long term, like the people that are making it work are the people who already have horses and an arena, and they are usually a couple and one of them is the mental health professional, the other is the horse person or they have their own team. Hiring, I found it very difficult because you only get so much money for a session. So to share that money with somebody else, I'm taking a cut unless I raised extra money. So you either have to become a non-profit or something and raise money or you have to have the means to do it yourself. So I only was able to do it because I kept it small and affordable, and then we did a lot of groups and that helped underwrite most of it.

Martina shares how she wishes EAP was made more accessible. Fortunately, her Indigenous clients with Indian Status are funded through non-insurance benefits, but others are left in a more precarious situation. She attributed this to the overall status of EAP and how it is recognized by insurance agencies:

I have had wishes for [EAP] to be a bit more accessible for people... it is more of an expensive form of therapy, and it's not accessible for everyone. I'm fortunate, I'm a provider through non-insurance benefits for people who are Indigenous and have Status. It's a really cool way for people to be able to access the therapy with no cost to them because it's a government funded program, so they just pay me directly. But I wish that there, like there are times when I just wish I could kind of bring this to a more community level, you know? I have

done a couple workshops before the pandemic. So there are some opportunities for that. But yeah, I think that funding piece and wishing it was more accessible, that's something that I really hope for... this blows my mind sometimes, but sometimes people don't believe that it's legitimate in a sense. So things like, I've had to kind of advocate for certain other kind of funding bodies to explain EAP, and to advocate for the fact that it is a legitimate thing before they would approve funding for someone. So I think I also would just kind of wish that it was better understood. So I appreciate people like you doing research on it, so I was happy to participate because it's important to do research on it. And to get more studies out there, more information out there about like, this is a real framework, right? You know, really create a lot of really cool opportunities for people's healing. Yeah, I do wish too that people would have a better understanding of it.

Issues with funding also stem from the scale of EAP practices. Some clinicians have offered group therapy or corporate team-building sessions as a way of subsidizing their individual, one-on-one therapeutic practice, but this is not always possible or in the best interests of the clinician's ideal practice or therapeutic training. Cherise highlighted the challenges of offering EAP on a smaller scale:

[Large EAP barns] have lots of horses, I'm just a one person show. My main job is I'm a psychologist, I run the practice, I see people and talk therapy, you know. And I do equine as part of that. So I don't need a big facility with 12 horses I'm working with. And I don't do corporate stuff, some people do. I mean, you can make a lot of money doing it, and I think that'd be great. But it's not a path I



chose to take. I do it in a smaller way, so I don't need a lot. So more like, you know, just bringing more awareness to it and helping people to access it. Because once they experience it, they want that. For more readily available, more funding for it, more acceptance of it, I think is what I'd want to see.

Building on this, Paulina again made the connection between the costs of EAP and the need for further funding:

You don't need a fancy arena, you don't need fancy horses, you don't need a lot of horses. I started out with three and just had three for a long time and an outdoor arena. And I've had up to nine, now the pandemic has brought us back down to four. I think that is the challenge of this work, it costs a lot of money. And the only way most people can do it is if they do a lot of fundraising and they have a non-profit organization. I never did, I just did group things to make more money that would help sustain and subsidize the individual for it. But you have to find ways to keep it going because it's a lot of money.

Both Cherise and Paulina highlight the challenges of offering EAP as a private practitioner in the context of the economization of care (Domene & Bedi, 2013), wherein private healthcare practitioners must balance market demands with their professional philosophies toward providing care. Paulina has resorted to funding her work through group and corporate sessions, but that isn't in Cherise's best professional interests; this decision of whether or not to follow one's training and professional ethos comes in conflict for some practitioners who require more significant payments to support their work.

Additionally, making connections with government agencies and funding bodies offers important opportunities for EAP clinicians to ensure their work is adequately recognized. As Dolly discussed:

I am really thrilled that [Veterans Affairs Canada], I've made some good connections with them. They refer folks to us. The fact that I'm a registered clinical social worker, people's benefits pay for them to come and see me. The fact that I have horses in the session, their benefits aren't covering equine therapy, their benefits are covering me as a therapist who happens to work with horses. So the more that we can just get that out there as mainstream I think that would be wonderful.

Who is systemically included and excluded from offering EAP is one of the major implications of the cost of this practice. Julie shared her insights about how the costs of horses and training tend to exclude Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) from getting involved on the practitioner side of EAP:

I have been involved in some training programs, so I think it starts with education and accessibility. If I look around Ontario, it's a very white, privileged, access to horses, class, money. I think it's important to have diverse trainers and opportunities for clients. So you know, is there ways to encourage BIPOC opportunities to become involved? That's one thing, I think, in training as well to bring these different pieces of knowing and knowledge that is coming forward in the neuroscience field, I think is only going to add capacity and professionalism. For people supporting other people and horses.

Julie's observation about who is systemically excluded from practicing EAP is reflected even in my participant sample: most EAP clinicians in my study self-identified as white and had grown up with horses in their lives. This sort of professional environment privileges those who were raised in middle- or upper-class families and resided in rural or suburban areas, with both means of transport to equestrian barns and the financial capacity to take riding lessons or own a horse.

### ***Need for Empirical Research***

Many of the EAP clinicians in my study participated as a way of addressing their frustrations with the recognition of EAP, hoping that contributing to further research would offer the field more legitimacy and scientific credit. Overall, further research was identified as one of the most important contributors to ensuring their work would be supported and recognized by insurance agencies and other funding bodies. Amie made her desire for further research clear:

I love seeing and hearing that people are getting into doing the research and the work [on EAP], because we need a lot more in this area for it to be recognized and really understood. So I appreciate you and the others out there wanting to research and understand it better.

Phoebe echoed Amie's sentiments:

Like I said before, I don't think there's enough [research]. I don't think there's enough research there. Just in general, there's not enough around the subject of EFW and I think we need more. And I think we need to develop it more.

Building on the need for more research, Cherise made the connection between research, perceived legitimacy, and funding sources and insurance agencies, highlighting how this is important for the field's accessibility as well:

I think it's funding sources [that need to change for EAP]. We need to get it out there that people who are in a position to be supportive, like, you know, [Worker Safety and Insurance Board] or places where credible academic journals that provide support for the work. Otherwise people say, 'Oh, it's just woo-woo stuff, it's just weird stuff.' But as long as we have clinical support, so research like this, stuff that's going to get published in journals we can go to and say, 'Look, this has been supported here. And this is what they found, you know, why aren't you funding it?' So I think it's about making it more accessible and acceptable.

In keeping with this sentiment, Dolly demonstrated that there is indeed the possibility to produce more empirical research to help support the legitimacy of the field and to ensure that the research reaches those who need to see it:

The more research we can get, empirical evidence-based research, the better. I can talk about these stories all day. I have done my own little bit of research a few years ago, I had a Bachelor of Social Work student come and work with me when I was in [city] and I was working three programs, I had enough work for her to come. And she was with me three days a week. And she did a small research project, and she did show empirically that people's level of whatever it was they were coming in with, anxiety, depression, trauma, she was able to show that it did move the needle in a positive direction. So the more that we can get that empirical research out there, the better. We know it works, we know that there's a shift and a change in people for the better. So the more that we can just get that out there, I think that would be very helpful.

In contrast to some of these accounts, which advocate for an appeal to scientific reasoning and legitimization of EAP, Paulina drew attention to some of the challenges of doing research in a bid to support EAP, calling into question the epistemology of traditional empirical research in psy-fields:

Much of the evidence has been anecdotal in the equine therapy field... I don't know how you... the only way you can have research based evidence is if you track and survey people beforehand, the way you would for anything, like how do you know with a couple, if you're using research based interventions to help with couples, but how do you gauge that if they're really changing as a couple other than they feel good about the relationship or they don't get divorced? Or maybe they're saying please and thank you more at home. Most people do not use skills we taught them in the office when they're in the middle of a fight at home. So it's really a difficult thing to gauge in terms and compare, because many of the interventions we use within the office are research based, CBT and different ones. But how accurate is that? How do you gauge that with your clients? The success rate, the outcomes, right? It's really difficult, other than a client saying 'Yeah, I feel better, I'm done now.'

I will further expand on this idea in a later discussion about spirituality and all that regulation and standardization leaves behind, but I argue that Paulina's quote points to a limit in the epistemology that informs most traditional scientific research conducted about psychology.

### ***Desire for Professional Regulation of EAP and a Move to Professionalization***

Much of the desire for further research, funding, and institutional support of EAP can be better understood within the framework of professionalization. In addition to the desire for more

empirical research to better understand how EAP works, many practitioners wanted to see further regulations established in the field to support consistency in training, practice, and professional recognition among practitioners, as well as control over who is and isn't recognized as an EAP practitioner. Much like the process of professionalization that psychotherapists underwent with the implementation of the *Psychotherapy Act*, this would follow Eliot Friedson's (1970) points about occupations' claims to agency and authority over their fields (i.e., specialized knowledges, authority over the content and form of the field, and control over who is included and excluded in the field). This desire for professionalization didn't always mean that EAP clinicians wanted to see one method of EAP dominating others, though policing who is and who isn't allowed to call themselves an EAP practitioner would indeed be a key component of this process. Amie shared her perspective on the EAP field, stating that it's got a long way to go and advocating for learning more about other approaches to EAP:

I think the general industry has a long way to go in terms of figuring out everything from its politics to who does what, but I think that's just because it's still so young in terms of being recognized and understood in terms of both the research and the types of people and what they do. And I don't know if it's just the type of people that get into horse work in general or psychology, all of that kind of combined. But I would love to see all the different avenues of [EAP] that are out there and ways of doing things and recognizing each other's strengths rather than being kind of divisive... I don't believe there's one type of [EAP] that's superior to the other... But building on that and learning and training in multiple areas, I think will add to the clinician rather than, you know, if you practice this way then you shouldn't practice that way. I get that vibe or that

sense amongst the different kind of certification groups and things that are going on. So I'd love to see that in terms of the industry. And I think it'll sort itself out as more research and understanding of all the different [types of EAP] start to come out. But it's got a long ways to go.

Carrie shared this perspective, saying that she would like to see more consistency in the field but still recognizing which approaches work best for different clients and horses:

Consistency. That's a good word, consistency. Yeah, but that's hard. Because you do want to honour different approaches, but consistency in terminology would be nice. Something more consistent.

Noreen has seen a lot of growth in the EAP field, which could be seen as a positive change:

There's all sorts of certificate programs and trainer programs. So there's different ways [of practicing], different modalities. And those modalities are influenced by the principles of how they work with a horse. So some modalities are focused on the horses having a choice in the relationship, others are more structured. So as a sector, I think it's evolved quite a bit, even in the 10 years that I've been aware of what's going on, I've seen a lot of movement.

Slightly deviating from recognizing different approaches, Phoebe wanted to see further regulation of the field to narrow down what EAP actually is as a practice, and to help others get a clearer understanding of what it means to do EAP or EFW:

I think there's not enough [of EAP]. There's not enough research on it and different like, certifications, there's so many different options, but I feel like nothing has been kind of narrowed down to give people a really good understanding of what you need to do EFW, there's a very broad spectrum in

terms of the trainings that are available and who's providing the trainings. You know, what's involved in the training? Some places you can't mount a horse, some places you're doing some mounted work paired with ground stuff with the clients. And so I think there's two very different ends of the spectrum and I definitely think that narrowing it down a little bit more to have a better definition of what exactly is EFW. Because, as you even said, there's EAT, there's EFW, there's EAGALA. Like there's so many different models you can use. And their standards of practice of what is ethically okay for you to practice is very different. So I definitely think that's an area that in Ontario we need to work on and expand. And I think that is exactly it, there's many individuals out there practicing with different qualifications and there's no kind of set standard...

...Getting more of a general across the board standards of practice. So that, you know, if you want to do any kind of equine related therapies, this is what you need to have, or how you need to be qualified. You know, you need to have two people, you can be mounted, you can not be mounted, and kind of getting that standardized across the board.

Though not all the EAP clinicians I spoke with were concerned about others practicing EFW or EAL inappropriately or without a license, a few did mention concerns about how these unregulated practitioners are working against the ongoing challenge to legitimize the field of EAP. Noreen shared concerns about people who enter the EFW field with good intentions, but don't have the training or the experience to adequately support those who come to them for help. Working to regulate the field, according to Noreen, would help clients avoid unqualified practitioners:



[EAP's] not regulated. And because it's not regulated, I think people tend to come into the work in different ways, with different forms of motivation, and from different walks of life. I kind of came into the work with a business background, with a recognition of the need to ensure that the work I was doing with it was within the scope of my practice, but there's a period of time where you don't even realize that you're working without your scope of practice, because people come to you. My original intent was to do leadership development and leadership coaching and team building and, you know, stuff comes up...

...I think there's not a lot of, there isn't necessarily consistency within the sector, and there are different... you have people who, I will call them wounded healers, working with others with the horse, and their intentions are great but they may not have the skill set to support clients in a way that's helpful for them.

Carrie approached a similar idea from a different perspective, concerned with how unqualified practitioners create a greater sense of confusion in the field about what EAP actually is, who is eligible for it, and whether insurance benefits will cover the costs. This lack of professional regulation in the field works against practitioners whose reputations hang in the balance:

Oh, the landscape in Ontario? Jeez, honestly, I don't even know. I should know more... I go with this intent to learn and gather more information, but I find it all so convoluted. I get this idea that somebody thinks, 'Okay, I have this great idea. But, you know, I want to make it my own. So I'm going to certify the [Carrie] Method. And this looks different, and this looks different.' And I just get exhausted by it. Like really, and the other thing I've always sort of hung my

hat on is I have a clinical Master's social work degree, like your benefits will pay for this therapy, I'm an actual therapist. So I always kind of go back to that, and I find it's not helpful that people that aren't actual therapists are doing some of this work. Like it's not even helpful, I just find it confusing. 'I don't know if my benefits will pay for this,' 'Yes, they will, I'm a Master's.' So I always kind of go back to like, I'm a mental health clinician, I happen to have this amazing background in horses, and I was able to get certified so I can bring it into my practice.

Interestingly, these points mirror the tensions experienced around psychiatrists, psychotherapists, and counselors in their struggles for professional recognition. It would almost seem that by identifying other workers in a related field as a problem to be solved with further regulation, the EAP practitioners strengthen their own professional resolve and claims to legitimacy.

### *Summary*

Altogether, it seems that the EAP clinicians in my study seek to professionalize the practice of EAP by implementing some sort of professional regulation around training in EAP and offering EAP services. I see this as a response to the designation of EAP as a complementary or alternative medicine, where practitioners and their work are not taken seriously by other health professionals and the general public despite their status as biomedically legitimate and CRPO-recognized psychotherapists. By professionalizing the field, EAP clinicians may better position themselves to receive funding from insurance agencies and governmental bodies, a process which is seemingly already underway. As some participants explained, EAP is becoming more mainstream and supported by empirical research and science, but as Amie said, the field still has "a long ways to go." Though not all clinicians want to see the field regulated and further

controlled, professionalization would likely offer benefits in terms of better compensation and professional recognition, and may offer an avenue to better regulate how EAP horses are cared for and treated during EAP sessions.

### **EAP Versus Traditional Talk Therapy**

While EAP clinicians expressed an eagerness to obtain biomedical recognition, they continually worked to distance their field from traditional talk therapies, despite what they perceived as the latter's biomedical legitimacy. This was often framed through the lens of EAP being a faster-working therapy, less stressful, more spiritual, and, generally, 'fun.' None of the EAP clinicians I spoke with were explicitly against traditional in-office talk therapy, and many of them work or used to work in-office offering traditional psychotherapy services at one point or another. However, they were quick to identify a number of differences between EAP and traditional talk therapy, in addition to quite a few advantages to doing EAP as both a client and a clinician.

### ***EAP Works Faster Than Traditional Talk Therapy***

When asked about what sets EAP apart from traditional talk therapies, many EAP clinicians spoke about how it tends to work faster than face-to-face in-office therapies. This was explained differently by various clinicians, but one of the main reasons behind this difference was that EAP is experiential, and thus clients cannot mask their emotions or what they are experiencing quite as adeptly. As discussed in Chapter 2, the horse is also instrumental in mirroring the dynamics at play. Paulina explained this phenomenon in the context of a family therapy session:

It's such a great assessment tool, because when you have a family out there, and you sit in your office, and you're trying to get a sense of what's happening in

the family dynamic, sometimes they'll enact that in your office, but everybody's pretty self-controlled. And they will tell you things that may not be true about what happens. But when you put them out there with the horses, and you're asking them to work as a family to accomplish a task, you see who's in charge, how they treat each other, what happens when one member is shunned or pushed out or picked on, and you can use that right in front of you. So I find that for couple therapy and family therapy, it accelerates the pace of the therapy towards the goals much better than just sitting in an office talking about it. I think if I had my way, I would only take couples and families into the arena. That's only what I'd do because the horses don't lie. Horses tell you what's going on there. And it's really fascinating to see it unfold. I think it is a much briefer model. If you're in the office, sometimes you can be with clients for weeks and months. But I find that with the sessions with the horses, you can accomplish the same thing in about six sessions. It's very direct to the point. And it's life changing for them, because it shifts their perspective. And that's what experiential learning does, it comes in the back door where there's no defenses, people are really good at having those defenses around themselves in an office setting, telling you what you want to hear, projecting a certain identity of who they are and what they're like. But when they're in an experiential situation, they can't do that. It's really hard to do that. And so the insight that when the lightbulb goes on will often come in a whole other way.

Brenda echoed Paulina's sentiments, pinning the faster progress on the clinician's ability to pick up on what the client is experiencing more quickly:

I think the process is a lot faster, I think what one can achieve in one session, it could take sometimes up to six months. Because you can't sort of... you can always lie, or present false parts to your therapist when you're in therapy, you can tell them whatever you want or what you do not want, correct? Well, when you're around five horses, it's going to be very challenging for you to not be... you can't lie to them. Basically, you can't sort of be something that you're not, or present something different. They'll pick up on it, which then I will pick up on it, and then maybe in a gentle way I may ask about what they feel is going on. So it's getting to the heart of the matter quickly.

A few clinicians also noted how EAP is often used as a new approach to therapy for clients who have grown frustrated with traditional talk therapy or who have stalled in their progress. Carrie explained how one of her clients almost immediately saw more progress in EAP than they did in their past experiences with talk therapy:

I had someone say to me after session two, they said 'Yeah, I got more out of that first session than I had in like a year and a half of therapy'... sometimes horses will present us with something, and then you're like, 'Oh, okay, let's talk about this.'

Dolly has had a similar experience with some of her clients, who come to see her for EAP after they get stuck in traditional psychotherapy:

But I also see so many people who come to us for equine therapy, and they've had years of traditional psychotherapy, whether it's been with a psychiatrist, psychologist, clinical registered social worker, whatever kind of format, and they say the same sort of thing. After about six or seven sessions, or about a

year, they get stuck. And so the equine therapy just seems to be able to take somebody who was really willing to dig a little deeper out of that place of being stuck.

The exact causal mechanism behind why EAP might work faster or help a client get ‘unstuck’ in their therapeutic journey isn’t exactly clear – it may simply be the result of working in a new environment, the experiential nature of EAP, or perhaps the relationship that the client can cultivate with the horse is a motivating and enjoyable part of the therapeutic process.

### ***EAP Is More Enjoyable Than Traditional Talk Therapy***

By far the most common differences between EAP and traditional in-office talk therapy that clinicians shared with me was that the process of EAP is more enjoyable than traditional talk therapy. This was attributed to a few reasons, including EAP being less stressful due to the presence and prominent interactions with a horse, more fun, more concrete, and very grounding. A major component to this is also that EAP was thought to involve opportunities for spiritual connection, which was made especially clear when practitioners discussed the importance of doing this work outdoors. All of this combined to make the EAP process more enjoyable, thus, clients tend to be more motivated to attend and participate fully within their therapeutic sessions. Amie summarized the importance of EAP being enjoyable for her clients:

...they just love the environment of it, it’s motivational, it’s enjoyable. I think just going out to a farm and being with horses and stuff tends to just be something that most people enjoy. Unless they’re scared of it or something, or have a fear of horses, most of the time it’s an enjoyable kind of experience. So the idea of driving to a therapist appointment, rather than kind of being stuck on the thought of, ‘I’m gonna have to talk about really uncomfortable topics and

emotions that I don't know if I'm ready to touch on yet' being kind of buffered with, 'Yeah, I know that's gonna happen, but I'm also going to get to go and see animals that I really enjoy and connect in that way and do it that way,' it feels safer and more enjoyable.

By incorporating a horse into the therapeutic process, clients tend to be more vulnerable and willing to open up without fear of judgement. Phoebe shared how this is especially impactful for the younger clients she tends to work with:

And then it leads to some of those client experiences... I may have an eight-year-old that's getting bullied, and they're not open to talking about it, about themselves, but when it's a horse and an external being they're willing to open up about that.

Part of the importance of the horse-human encounter is that it brings up practical experiences for the client and clinician to work through together. Phoebe elaborated on the value of these experiences compared to traditional in-office therapy:

I find in-office therapy, there's a lot of worksheets and a lot of direction, and kind of telling the client what they need to do and where they're at, again, I work with under-12s... so lots of direction in there. But when I go out to the horses, I typically find, you know, the clients bring out much more raw emotion. When they're out with the horses, I can go out with a horse and a client's anxiety goes up. And in that moment there's very practical experiences that we can work on that we wouldn't be able to work on in the office where, you know, it might be a hypothetical situation.

Expanding on this thought, Phoebe shared how being able to communicate with the horses by using body language is especially impactful for her clients:

I have some clients that will not communicate at all in office, like, barely want to say two words to the therapist themselves, and then if I bring them out to the barn, like they can communicate in different ways. Like, sometimes they may not use their words, but they're communicating with their body language. I find just bringing a kid out to the barn, they automatically want to interact and engage, whether that's, you know, doing a grooming exercise or doing a more non-directive, just getting to know the horse in the fields, petting them.

The combination of EAP being more enjoyable, less judgemental, and more experiential allows clients to be more vulnerable with the horses when compared to traditional in-office talk therapy.

As Phoebe told me:

Yeah, I think it is very different [from in-office talk-therapy]. I've had some situations where I have been able to be a little more nondirective in the sense of having a client come out and just saying, you know, get to know this horse, and they go out and they get to know the horse, and they're just standing there petting the horse, and all of a sudden they start bawling their eyes out. And it just brings out so much raw emotion in different types of clients, it allows them that space, and I feel like when you're sitting face to face, in an office with a person, it's hard to be vulnerable, like so hard to open up and start crying about something or to work through and process something. Whereas I feel like when you have a horse in this situation, the horse almost becomes a therapist as well. And they're able to talk to that horse, and you might still be there and ask some questions, or



I've had sessions where I didn't talk to the client barely at all, and I just let them talk to the horse and I was there listening. But they were able to get so much out to the horse because it's not someone that's gonna say, 'Stop having that thought, stop thinking this, stop doing this, stop doing that.' And they really have that source and that outlet to just, you know, sit there petting a horse and tell all their secrets, and not be told what they need to do or what they're doing wrong or anything like that... but yeah, a big difference is that external animal and external space.

Carrie emphasized the more grounded, in-the-moment characteristics of her EAP practice, explaining why people tend to be attracted to EAP and how it is different from traditional talk therapy:

It's not your traditional style of therapy. Teenagers don't do well on a couch face-to-face... The other thing is you go outside, like, sometimes people don't go outside. The other thing too, is you can build relationships with the horse that maybe you couldn't build with another person. Or maybe they can't even build with me yet. It's a very non-judgemental type of therapy. And I find too, with adding in the horse component, it takes away that like awkward kind of conversation back-and-forth, back-and-forth. And the other thing, focus on the here and now. So, let's focus on the here. What's your body doing? Are you breathing? What's this horse doing? What do you think about that? So it's like, okay, we're here in the moment.

Aligned with Phoebe's comments, Carrie attributed much of the value of EAP to how experiential and concrete it is for her clients, which tends to be more fun and less intrusive.

Carrie elaborated on this idea by using the example of someone looking to build up their confidence through practice:

So that's really kind of the more clinical stuff that I'm talking about now, what I think sets it apart from other therapies for teens and youth is it's very concrete. So it's like, 'Oh, I want to work on confidence.' Perfect, let's work on confidence. Let's catch that horse, let's walk with them, let's ask them to stop, let's look at their body language. What are they doing? How are you feeling? So that's more of like, the less clinical, like it's still clinical, but it's less like, I'm not in their inner world dicking around. It's like, let's build up to that, right? And it's fun, and it's fun.

This concrete element is especially helpful when working with kids, as Carrie stated that she and her client don't have to talk when they're working with horses, it "just breaks the ice that much better." Dolly built on Carrie's comments, noting how EAP can be fun and playful:

I think there's so many things that set it apart. Taking somebody out of the traditional kind of sitting and doing nothing but talking, and there's an element of playfulness, there's an element of fun. There's an element of, no matter what happens in this, we want people to leave feeling somewhat shifted than when they came in. It doesn't always mean they're going to feel happier or better. Something within them shifts somehow... The metaphors we use, and the horses become so incredibly unique in the session. You can't do that in traditional talk therapy.

While EAP may be a more fun and possibly more playful therapeutic experience for clients once they are there, it doesn't entirely explain what tends to draw clients to EAP in the first place.

According to Paulina, this likely has to do with a curiosity about horses and greater desire for connection that many people share:

Most people think it's neat, it's different, it's not therapy. And a lot of people have a very romantic notion about horses, and they want to touch them and pet them and be with them. And I think there is also this desire of some kind of connection, people are hungry for connection. And the thing that's so appealing is because it is experiential, and this is a real time connection. Horses are non-judgemental, they're not going to say anything, they're not going to judge them. They're just going to respond to what the person does; I think that's very appealing to them too.

What most stands out to me about this quote is Paulina's point that people are drawn to EAP because they think that it's not therapy. For me, this statement stands in stark contrast to the discussion about EAP clinicians desiring more recognition for their biomedical legitimacy – if clients are drawn to EAP because it is different from traditional, biomedically-recognized talk-therapy, what sorts of challenges might that pose for clinicians who wish to see the field become more professionalized, and what room does this leave for some of the less-tangible benefits of EAP?

### ***EAP Is More Spiritual Than Traditional Talk Therapy***

One of the most prominent differences between EAP and traditional talk therapy identified by clinicians was that therapy sessions typically take place outdoors. While for some practitioners being outdoors is helpful for clients who are working on mindfulness and grounding themselves, it can take on a deeper meaning as part of a more spiritual approach to therapy that incorporates not just the mind, but the body, environment, and soul. Here, I understand

spirituality as a feeling of being part of something larger than oneself – in essence, to be connected to other humans, animals, and the environment in a way that may transcend physical being. I am only sharing quotes from participants who explicitly referenced ‘spirituality’ in our conversations, but many more EAP clinicians indirectly drew on ideas relating to spirituality by talking about the importance of grounding, mindfulness, and centering oneself in the moment. Feelings of spirituality may be evoked by being outdoors with animals or in nature, but this is not always the case. One specific conversation comes to mind with Martina, who often works with Indigenous clients. Martina was able to connect land-based components of working outdoors in nature and in season with her clients’ therapeutic and life journeys, weaving these with the experiential nature of EAP and opportunities for playfulness and fun:

...there’s an opportunity to make some connections with some animals. And I work with a lot of Indigenous clients too, and there’s certainly a spiritual aspect to it. For some people, animals are spiritual beings. There’s connections that go beyond... I don’t know, just beyond, right? And go into this spiritual level. So I think they find that piece really meaningful. And the fact that it’s land based, too, like a lot of time outdoors. I’m thinking about an Indigenous client who always just wanted to be out in the field and they were coming to me in the summer. It was great, it was just beautiful. They often came in the evening, we’d all watch the sunset as we were chatting and being with the horses. And they would often really connect to the cycle of the seasons, even the cycle of the sun setting down and coming back. There’s pieces that were really validating for them about some of the seasons of their life and what they were going through, too... but when I’ve worked with younger kids in the past, there’s that piece

around... and actually, this isn't just for kids, but that piece around play, too, can be really meaningful. Horses can be playful, right?... There's this playful part of it that can be so important, thinking about some little kids I used to work with who were in care, [Children's Aid Society]. And a lot of their stuff was that they had to be parents in a lot of ways to other kids or to their parents. And so having opportunities to just be silly and play with the horses. They would come in the winter and just like, fall into snowbanks. And make snow angels. It was just, there's that land-based piece to it that really fostered play as well. Yeah, I think clients do benefit as well from the experiential piece.

In Martina's account of the benefits of working outdoors, with the land and in season, the experiential part of EAP is interwoven with some of the more spiritual and holistic components of EAP. She also highlights the importance of fun and play when working with horses in EAP, something that was mentioned by other clinicians but did not always connect directly back to the idea of spirituality. For Martina, working with horses outdoors also offered opportunities for different kinds of connection with the land and other animals:

I think that experiential piece is very meaningful for clients too. I think it's about connection, it's about being with the horses and with the land. I've had some Indigenous clients too, for some people, spirits can visit them through birds. And there's even been times when we've been in the field and a certain bird has visited them and they feel like that might be a close relative who's passed away or something like that. There's just all these opportunities for different kinds of connection.

While less specific to a cultural form of spirituality, Julie also identified the spiritual component of EAP as something that is integral to its practice, aligned with centering the mind, body, and emotions. Indeed, being outside and integrating spiritual components of EAP may be beneficial for clients who are not Indigenous, too:

One thing is working outside in season and in nature, it's just been brilliant. Having authentic connection, it's holistic and experiential. So it really is the mind, the body, the emotion and the spirit. Bringing all those possibilities together for however that appears for the person to support them.

Elaborating on this point, Julie shared some anecdotes about the opportunities for connection with nature and other animals, stressing the importance of being open to these experiences:

So I think even outside, when we show up in different seasons or with trees, or the birds come in. I had a session one time where this person was really coming through a depression, so couldn't get out, couldn't move. Being reconnected was really important. In the middle of our session, with the horse outside, we watched a fox come through the field and play with this leaf, coming right up and playing. And the horse, myself, the client and I were just so awestruck by this beautiful encounter. And it was almost like the fox was so into its play and then it noticed us and ran off. So there, it provides that interconnected ability, like even during COVID when folks have been removed and isolated, but we can step outside and be part of some living earth system. Through the horses, through being outside, through the seasons, through the fox. I had a racoon one time on a tree, right beside the round pen. And the racoon was not going to move. It was just amazing, it stayed there the whole time. And then when the session was over, it

climbed down and ran away. So I don't know, sometimes just being open to that whole field around us is important for that interconnectedness of where, who we are, where we come from, culturally and ancestrally.

Aligned with Julie's accounts, Paulina shared how EAP is profoundly spiritual, bringing non-concrete meanings to the surface through experiential and embodied learning:

And I think for me, having an interest in spiritual things, this is a profoundly spiritual work. I'm not referring to religious necessarily, I'm referring to... there is a level of meaning that is not just concrete, you know what I mean? We're bringing it to the concrete level, but there is another level of meaning. And that's where people often learn. It isn't in just saying, 'This is what you need to do. And here's how you need to do it and practice these things.'

Originally, I wasn't going to address the idea of spirituality within EAP, but it stands in such stark contrast to the discussion about a need for further regulation and consistency within the EAP field as well as the expressed need for more empirical research. Paulina addressed this tension in her concerns about what qualities traditional scientific measurements leave out in psychological research, and I believe this is the perfect example of what she might mean – if a significant benefit of EAP is its openness to spirituality, and opportunities to connect with other animals, nature, and deeper parts of yourself, what sort of harm might over-regulating EAP do to its clients and clinicians? Traditional Western science and epistemologies have neglected to consider the value of emotion, intuition, and interconnectedness as important ways of making sense of the world and oneself, relying instead on notions of rationality, objectivity and empiricism (Gerhardt-Strachan, 2022). Though it is beyond the scope of my thesis project, the benefits of a more spiritual approach to EAP and the opportunities that it may present to us are

manifold: we could change our understanding of what health means, reconsider what good relations between humans and animals entail, and recognize our mutual dependencies and the need for mutual flourishing between species. Exploring and embracing spirituality in EAP could help clear a path forward in encouraging further support for better working and living conditions and respect for horses in EAP while still maintaining the intangible “sparkle” in horse-human relationships in a clinical setting. However, demands for professionalization and biomedical recognition present clinicians with challenges in terms of preserving their practice and honouring their ethical and professional obligations.

### ***Summary***

In view of the EAP field’s desire for further regulation and professionalization, the constant distancing of traditional talk therapies in contrast to EAP presents me with a clear challenge: EAP practitioners seemingly require professionalization to ensure unfettered access to biomedical legitimacy as a CAM, and hopefully by producing more research and stringent qualifications to practice EAP external funding bodies will be more willing to support EAP clinicians and their work, expanding access to the field as a profession as well as a service. However, this professionalization is challenged by the field’s difference from the more biomedically recognized traditional talk therapies that are typically funded through OHIP and personal insurance benefits. It is these differences that make EAP a more appropriate and holistic therapy for both clients and clinicians – by positioning EAP as different-from traditional talk therapies, EAP can be presented as a therapy for those who have grown tired of in-office talk therapy that EAP clinicians characterize as less fun and more judgemental and intimidating. It may indeed be EAP’s image as a CAM that attracts clients to the practice, and by positioning it as a holistic therapy that is profoundly spiritual, one must ask what benefits get left behind in the



researching, regulation, and standardization of EAP. There is no guarantee that the professionalization of EAP will result in the same benefits that the professionalization of psychotherapy and other health-related disciplines did, as Sabine Flick (2021) argues. Working as an EAP clinician in a landscape that is growing more psychologized by the day may simply mean that EAP will become more accepted on its own without further intervention.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have traced the competing tensions for and against professionalization experienced by the EAP clinicians in my study. While it is possible to acknowledge the less empirical benefits of a certain therapeutic modality without sacrificing its biomedical legitimacy, working to regulate EAP and ensure more consistency in its practice could threaten some of the more unique and beneficial characteristics of EAP compared to traditional talk therapies. As it stands, EAP is seemingly becoming more widely accepted by other healthcare professions without further intervention. This is evidenced by the partnerships being made between Veterans Affairs Canada and individual EAP practices and practitioners, including Dolly. Brenda has also noticed changes in how EAP is being understood by other mental healthcare professionals, including psychiatrists (who typically occupy the top of the pyramid of psychotherapeutic professionals):

And I think there'll be more and more [acceptance of EAP]. I know in the States, they're doing a lot more. I think in Canada, it's starting to become more popular. And some of my clients are working with psychiatrists at [nearby hospital] or they may need more care. And they're starting to talk about their sessions with me. And I'm usually an add-on in that case, like I'm not their primary caregiver as far as mental health. There's usually a team that I work with. And it's

interesting when the psychiatrists are starting to ask, ‘What is it that you do within these [EAP sessions], how does that work?’, because they’re coming from a completely different perspective. And it’s very medicated. It’s not a lot of talk therapy. So now you’re talking about horses, and you’re hanging around horses, how does that help? So my clients are sharing with me what they’re telling their psychiatrist at [nearby hospital], the head psychiatrist, and they’re starting to be more and more curious. And they’re starting to listen and they find it fascinating.

Leaving ‘well enough’ alone won’t do much to benefit current EAP practitioners who are struggling to afford the demands of their practice or help to advocate for funding from insurance agencies who do not recognize the legitimacy of their work, nor will it offer protections for the horses who work in EAP. I think the growing acceptance of EAP signals a larger shift in how our culture understands health, wellbeing, and ‘healing.’ Wellness encompasses more than physical health, and the growing psy-culture of the last century and normalization of therapeutic practice rejects (or at the very least challenges) the dominant biomedical mind/body dualism that was popularized and made a tenet of Enlightenment rationality. The popularization of EAP could invite animals and nature into our understandings of wellness, which calls on us to recognize the importance of spirituality and ‘being well together.’ EAP thus rejects a siloed perspective of health and recognizes the mutual dependencies that humans and animals share and require to flourish. Though change may be slow, I strongly believe that EAP will become more mainstream in the next few years, with or without the establishment of a regulatory college dedicated to EAP and the guidelines that go along with it. I believe that upholding the spirituality of EAP could present clinicians with a unique opportunity to reject Eurocentric, Western notions of

individuality and anthropocentrism. However, in light of the ongoing demand for professionalization, greater funding, and regulation (which inherently requires appealing to biomedical legitimacy), EAP clinicians are left to navigate the conflicting messages of the pro-professionalization and pro-spirituality discourses. As Nicola Gale (2014) outlined, the binary between CAM and traditional biomedicine is problematic – by positioning CAMs (and thus EAP) as opposed to traditional biomedicines, the opportunity to view similarities across modalities is cast aside in favour of upholding tidy boundaries. Defending the importance of a spiritual practice in EAP alongside its legitimacy as a psychotherapeutic modality will require a serious reconsideration of the epistemology underlying the Western scientific paradigm.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Conclusion**

In this thesis, I have sought to make sense of the human-horse relationship in EAP. Through 12 semi-structured interviews with EAP clinicians and equine specialists, I tried to better understand what it is about the horse-human relationship that makes EAP therapeutic, what it is about horses or ‘horsiness’ that makes the horse-human relationship therapeutic, and what sorts of ethical questions emerge when considering the interests of the horse alongside the interests of the human.

In Chapter 2, I interpreted EAP clinicians’ approaches to animal rights as belonging (mostly) to one of three ethics: (1) the ethic of identity, (2) the ethic of difference, and (3) the ethic of indistinction. I argued that most EAP clinicians aligned themselves with the more traditional, humanistic ethic of identity, as they discussed at length the ways that their horses are like humans and therefore deserving of certain rights and freedoms. While it is important that EAP clinicians recognize the work that their EAP horses do, this work-based recognition of their identity and rights does little to advance the freedoms of animals who are not recognized for their sentience, subjectivity and agency and leaves the anthropocentrism of certain animal rights movements unchallenged. A few clinicians approached the issue of their horses’ wellbeing through the animal difference approach, which finds value in difference and doesn’t necessarily award rights based on how closely animals approach human-like characteristics. I argue that a major shortcoming of this approach is that it doesn’t do much to work on the dissolution of species boundaries, and an overemphasis based on differences may have the ill effect of discouraging greater relations and solidarity across species boundaries. Ultimately, I advocate for a fuller approach to animal indistinction within EAP, calling on clinicians to adopt the ethos of

‘being well together’ as a way of looking beyond species boundaries. Though many EAP clinicians were indeed transgressing species boundaries in meaningful ways, this was a mostly superficial recognition of animal rights applied to a very specific kind of horse-human relationship. While I do not consider the ethic of identity approach to be better or worse than the ethic of difference approach, I see further possibilities for animal justice and shared flourishing by adopting the animal indistinction approach, as it necessarily requires humans to rethink the way we relate to animals in all contexts.

In Chapter 3, I turned my attention to the EAP clinician’s professional experiences with EAP to help make sense of the general tone of defensiveness I had picked up on throughout most of my interviews. I interpreted these comments by analyzing them through a lens of professionalization, where most EAP clinicians had hoped to strengthen the professional regulation and recognition of the field, resulting in greater funding and respect. These comments could be understood through a Foucauldian lens as a desire to possess a more influential claim to power. In contrast to this desire for greater professionalization and calls for scientific empirical research was all the qualities that EAP clinicians claimed set EAP apart from traditional talk therapies. The claim that EAP is more spiritual than traditional talk therapies is seemingly at odds with the claims that EAP is just as scientific and biomedically legitimate as other kinds of therapies. The epistemology that underlies Western scientific research is borne out of 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment thinkers, who separated the workings of the mind from the workings of the body. This is a wholesale rejection of the importance of spirituality for one’s wellbeing, and so a holistic approach to wellbeing and health (which was described by most EAP clinicians) necessarily conflicts with their desire to belong more fully to the biomedical model of mental healthcare that would likely be achieved by further professionalizing. If the field undergoes

professionalization, EAP clinicians may have to leave behind important parts of their practice. I concluded that on its own, EAP is starting to become a more respected and recognized form of therapy – while progress may be slow, there have been significant changes in the acceptance of the field already. I continue to see the value of a spiritual EAP practice and defending the field's legitimacy as a psychotherapeutic practice alongside the importance of its spirituality will require researchers and practitioners to reconsider the epistemology that underlies the Western scientific paradigm.

### **Closing Reflections and Future Directions**

I think it is important to end this thesis with some reflections about the fundamental tensions underlying my discussions: What work does this project actually do in service of the horses involved in EAP, or animals more generally? How does this project advance animal justice and freedoms? I know that in and of itself, academic analysis isn't enough. During the researching and writing stages of this thesis, I had to come to terms with the fact that one of the major shortcomings of this work is that it doesn't directly address or affect animal justice movements; perhaps this thesis can instead serve as a jumping-off point for future work within EAP and critical animal studies involving AATs more generally. I hope that engaging EAP clinicians in conversation was helpful for them in terms of clarifying their EAP philosophies and thinking critically about the involvement of horses in their work. I was (rather naïvely) surprised at the reflexivity that most EAP clinicians displayed in their interviews – it is clear that practitioners are already thinking about some of the power relations at play in their EAP practices, and I did not expect myself to embrace the horse-human relationship in EAP as one that is more respectful and possibly less exploitative than most leisure riding horse-human relationships.

The question of ‘animal freedom’ in EAP is a tricky one – while the balance of power in EAP relationships is no doubt in favour of the EAP clinician, EAP horses assert their agency in everyday mundane ways by enthusiastically going along with the EAP process or finding ways to express their desire not to work. EAP clinicians recognized this in their own horses, with Martina noting that her horses could kill her if they wanted to. I don’t know if true freedom – that is, the ability to live one’s life however one may wish, without the threat of life-sustaining support being withheld – is possible for EAP horses (or any domesticated animal), though some of my participants thought otherwise. One of the major points of the indistinction approach to animal rights is that we (humans and animals alike) are all dependent on each other in myriad ways; perhaps it is more generative to think about honouring our mutual dependencies and treating those whom we care for, and those who care for us, in ways that enhance the shared pleasure of our existences.

I think the overall goal of “being well together” in multispecies healing contexts remains important in and beyond the field of EAP. Multispecies healing projects are inherently holistic and spiritual, especially those that rely on methods of ‘grounding’ and being present in the moment. These relationships offer many opportunities for relating across species boundaries, and not just with animals that possess humanlike traits and qualities. To follow an animal indistinction approach is as exciting as it is frustrating – the lack of instruction for how to transgress species boundaries makes progress and action challenging but leaves us with untold opportunities for change. What might EAP look like if we continue to take this ethos to heart? I’m reminded of Kirk, Pemberton and Quick’s (2019) comment about how retired medical maggots are treated compared to retired guide dogs – both nonhumans do valuable work that benefits humans and should be treated as such. Perhaps future projects might consider what this

looks like in the context of EAP and other multispecies healing scenarios. I believe Kendra Coulter's idea of 'humane jobs' for animals and humans to be an important jumping off-point for this work, as it may help EAP horses and clinicians enter into more respectful and enjoyable working relationships with each other.

There are a number of theoretical threads that I was unable to follow in this thesis, and one of the first pieces of advice I received while working on analyzing my transcripts was that it is impossible to include everything; however, I would like to identify some gaps in my research and smaller themes that arose in my interviews that may offer new insights into the field of EAP:

1. This project focused solely on the EAP clinician's perspectives of their practice. Further studies will be needed to better understand how clients experience EAP, especially concerning how EAP is experienced differently across systems of gender, race, age, disability, and ethnicity. The gender dynamics of EAP (regarding clients and clinicians, as well as the possible gendering of the horses) is beyond the scope of this project, though a few EAP clinicians mentioned that men in service roles respond differently to horses in EAP compared to their other clients. Relatedly, a gendered analysis of care work in EAP would further help elucidate some of the tensions in EAP being recognized as a legitimate form of psychotherapy.
2. This project did not focus directly on the horses involved in EAP. Though this was largely the result of time constraints and COVID-19 precautions, I was unable to integrate an ethnographic component in this project. Future studies could take EAP as the focus of a multispecies ethnography to better understand the power relations at play in EAP sessions and how the horses live, work, and play throughout the rest of



their lives. This may also be fruitful for generating ideas about how EAP could be improved for the horses that make this practice possible.

3. Building on the theme of spirituality (and in particular, integrating a culturally specific land-based spiritual approach), EAP could be explored as a healing modality that takes into consideration culturally specific spiritual beliefs for Indigenous clinicians and clients.

Throughout this thesis, the tension underlying both of my frames of analysis have had to do with the Western scientific paradigm that informs how we think of our selves, our health, and the world around us. Ultimately, critical animal studies approaches to animal rights have been in opposition to the ideas about animals that proliferated among major theoreticians like Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, and René Descartes. Each of these thinkers is thought to embody the Western scientific paradigm of their time, and if their approaches to animals range from indifference to disdain, then we can understand animal rights theories as those that are responding to the humanist ideologies of Western scientific epistemologies. It is these epistemologies that inform most of the Western world's understandings of animals as expendable resources intended either for consumption or companionship, and which normalizes relations of domination over animals in service of human pleasures.

Likewise, EAP clinicians' frustrations with biomedical recognition can be traced back to the tension between their practice as a complementary or alternative medicine despite their training as biomedically legitimate psychotherapeutic practitioners. The Western scientific paradigm, borne out of the Enlightenment, stipulates the separation of mind and body – any healing modality that incorporates notions of holism or spirituality is thus going against the grain of the dominant scientific epistemology. Though many EAP clinicians would like for the field to

undergo further professionalization and align themselves more closely with biomedical legitimacy, their holistic practice may present challenges, both in terms of what benefits might get left behind in a process of quantification, as well as the possible discrediting of the importance of spirituality and holism in EAP.

In both animal rights discourses as well as professionalization discourses, the traditional Western scientific paradigm can be taken as the source of much tension and ideological conflict. Therefore, a personal and professional goal that I have realized through this project, one that eclipses my thesis itself, is the reconsideration of Western scientific epistemologies to better value non-humanistic relations with all beings and consider the importance of variables which cannot be so easily measured. I stated in my introduction that I had hoped that by better understanding the human-horse relationships in EAP, I would be able to identify and promote other ways of being in the world with animals. I don't yet know how to achieve this, but I believe the reconsideration of our current scientific epistemology to be an important step forward in being well, together.

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# Appendix A

## GREB Approval



January 10, 2022

Miss Jillian Takacs  
Queen's University

**Title: "GSKHS-405-21 Equus Therapeuticus: Understanding Equine-Assisted Therapy, the Horse, and Multispecies Healing Relationships;" TRAQ # 6035279**

Dear Miss Takacs:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled **"GSKHS-405-21 Equus Therapeuticus: Understanding Equine-Assisted Therapy, the Horse, and Multispecies Healing Relationships;"** for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS 2) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (Article 6.14) and Standard Operating Procedures (405), your project has been cleared for one year.

You are reminded of your obligation to submit an annual renewal form prior to the annual renewal due date (access this form at <http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html/>; click on "Events;" under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Annual Renewal/Closure Form for Cleared Studies"). Please note that when your research project is completed, you need to submit an Annual Renewal/Closure Form in Romeo/traq indicating that the project is 'completed' so that the file can be closed. This should be submitted at the time of completion; there is no need to wait until the annual renewal due date.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one-year period (access this form at <http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html/>; click on "Events;" under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Adverse Event Form"). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example, you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To submit an amendment form, access the application by at <http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html/>; click on "Events;" under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Request for the Amendment of Approved Studies." Once submitted, these changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, GREB, at University Research Services for further review and clearance by GREB or the Chair, GREB.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dean A. Tripp".

Professor Dean A. Tripp, PhD  
Chair, General Research Ethics Board (GREB)  
Departments of Psychology, Anesthesiology & Urology  
Queen's University

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Guide**

**Study Title:** Equus Therapeuticus: Understanding Equine-Assisted Therapy, the Horse, and Multispecies Healing Relationships

**Name of Principal Investigator:** Jillian Takacs, School of Kinesiology and Health Studies, Queen's University

**Name of Supervisor:** Dr. Samantha King

**Supervisor Email:** kingsj@queensu.ca

**Interview Guide:** Clinician

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
2. How long have you been practicing as a therapist?
3. What drew you to EAT?
4. What sets EAT apart from other therapies?
5. How do you understand the role of the horse in EAT?
6. Do you have any concerns about the work you require the horses to do?
  - a. Can you tell me about a time a horse has been uncooperative in a therapy session?
7. What do you think the client finds meaningful about EAT?
8. Is there anything you would change to improve the EAT experience for both the horse and the client?

## Appendix C

### Letter of Information and Consent Form

- ✓ Hello, my name is Jill Takacs from the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies at Queen's University. I am working under the supervision of Dr. Samantha King.
- ✓ I am inviting you take part in a research study titled, Equus Therapeuticus: Understanding Equine-Assisted Therapy, the Horse, and Multispecies Healing Relationships. This study is focusing on the perspectives of clients and clinicians of equine-assisted therapy.
- ✓ The purpose of this study is to better understand how equine-assisted therapy clinicians understand the importance equine-assisted therapy and see what about the horse-human relationships makes this form of therapy unique.
- ✓ If you agree to take part, I will interview you for 30 to 60 minutes over Zoom or phone call.
- ✓ The interview will be recorded using Zoom's recording function and later transcribed. Quotes will be de-identified using a pseudonym of your choice and used in the analysis of this project.
- ✓ It is a risk that some of the questions may upset you, as they are about your experiences administering animal-assisted psychotherapy and may prompt you to reflect on difficult professional experiences.
- ✓ If you feel upset after the interview, please visit the Distress and Crisis Ontario website at [dcontario.org](http://dcontario.org) for resources and information, or call Telephone Aid Line Kingston (TALK) at 613-544-1771
- ✓ We will be collecting information such as your age, sex, gender, and general location (i.e., whether you live in a rural, urban, or suburban area) to offer social and demographic context for the analysis of the interview data.
- ✓ Study results will help add to the body of literature about the value and importance of animal-assisted therapies, and how these therapies work.
- ✓ There are no tangible incentives for participating in this study.
- ✓ Participation in this study is voluntary. You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to. You can stop participating at any time without penalty.
- ✓ You will receive a copy of your transcript upon completion of the interview to help inform your decision to take part (or not) in the study.
- ✓ You may withdraw from until completion of the project by contacting me at [jill.takacs@queensu.ca](mailto:jill.takacs@queensu.ca)

- ✓ You may request to have your data withdrawn from the study up until publication.
- ✓ Your confidentiality will be protected, to the extent permitted by applicable laws.
- ✓ The study data will be stored on an encrypted hard drive on Queen's University servers. The code file that links real names with pseudonyms and study ID numbers will be stored securely and separately from the data on an encrypted USB key.
- ✓ Data will be shared only with the PI's supervisor, Dr. Samantha King.
- ✓ I will keep your data securely for at least five years per Queen's University Policy, after which the de-identified data will be deposited into the Queen's University's Institutional Repository. The code file identifying your pseudonym and study ID number will be destroyed five years after study closure.
- ✓ In addition to the Principal Investigator and their supervisor, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council will have access to study results upon completion.
- ✓ Access to the study data is limited to the researcher team and the Queen's General Research Ethics Board (GREB) may request access to study data and/or all other study materials used in this research to ensure that we (the research team) have or are meeting our ethical obligations in conducting this research. GREB is bound by confidentiality agreements and will not release any personal information.
- ✓ I plan to publish the results of this study in academic journals and present them at conferences. I will include quotes from some of the interviews when presenting my findings. I will never include any real names with quotes. I will do my best to make sure quotes do not identify participants. During the interview, please let me know if you say anything you do not want me to quote.
- ✓ If you have any questions about the research, please contact [kingsj@queensu.ca](mailto:kingsj@queensu.ca).
- ✓ If you have any ethics concerns please contact the General Research Ethics Board (GREB) at 1-844-535-2988 (Toll free in North America) or email [chair.GREB@queensu.ca](mailto:chair.GREB@queensu.ca).
- ✓ This verbal consent process and Letter of Information (LOI) provides you with the details to help you make an informed choice. All your questions should be answered to your satisfaction before you decide whether or not to participate in this research study. Please keep a copy of this LOI for your records.
- ✓ I will be documenting your verbal consent in our research records.
- ✓ You have not waived any legal rights by consenting to participate in this study.
- ✓ I confirm the participant has verbally consented to the following:
  - I have explained all aspects of this study to the participant as outlined in the LOI.
  - I have answered all of the participant's questions to their satisfaction and the participant had

sufficient time to consider their participation in this study.

- The participant was informed that they may choose to stop their participation at any time for any reason without penalty.
- The participant was informed that their legal rights would not be affected by consenting to participate in this study.
- The participant was provided with a copy of the Letter of Information for their records.
- The participant consented to the use of audio recording
- The participant consented to the use of video recording
- The participant consented to the use of use of anonymous quotes
- The participant verbally agreed to participate in this study and to follow the study procedures.

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**Participant Study ID**

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**Signature of Person Obtaining  
Verbal Consent**

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**Printed Name**

---

**Date of Verbal Consent  
Obtained**