Public acceptance and using horses in sport: What's it got to do with me?!

Dr Tamzin Furtado



So much is changing across horse sport (incl breeding for sport) and we have all come a long way



Something to be really proud of

WBFSH Values – what should they be, a starter for 10!

Respect horses
Prioritise individual horses' needs

Provide horses with a good life
Give equal consideration to the physical health and mental wellbeing of horses

Prioritise horse welfare
Promote horse's lived experience by providing opportunities to express natural behaviours and choice

Be solution driven
Engage in ethical and evidence-informed, pragmatic, responsible and sustainable solutions to individual and global challenges in the breeding sector

Be trustworthy through transparency & accountability
Engage in ethical and evidence-based decision making informed by regular horse welfare assessment

Be committed to evolve
Be innovative, be curious and keep learning to continue to evolve for a responsible and sustainable breeding industry

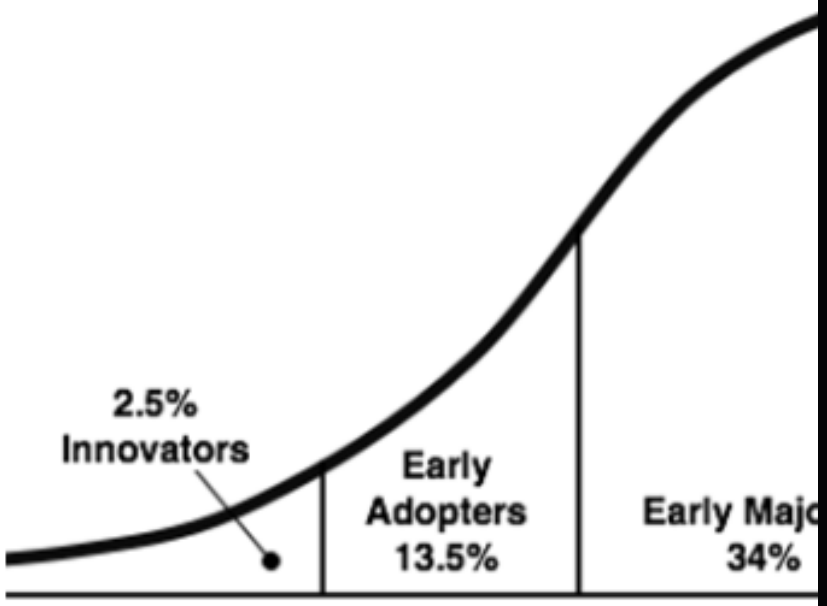


If we're moving forward, what's public perception got to do with anything?

(SLO) is the public or ‘social’ acceptance, which grants permission or a ‘license’ to an organization to undertake its activity; i.e., to ‘operate’

Morrison, J. The Social License: How to Keep Your Organization Legitimate; Palgrave Macmillan: London, UK, 2014

Diffusion of innova



https://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/mph-module



WorldHorseWelfare

- "The public appear to have become slightly less supportive of involving horses sport than in previous years, with an uptick in the last two years in the percentage of respondents saying they do not support this under any circumstances (from 19.5% in 2024 to 24.4% this year).
- The percentage of those who support the continued involvement of horses in sport has decreased from 23.3% in 2024 to 20.9%.
- ...63.8% of UK adults are not content with the status quo
- Those who believe that short-term pain or discomfort to improve performance is not very or not at all acceptable (77.3%).
- Only 5.4% of respondents said they trust a lot that most people involved in horse sport train their horses in a way that they believe is acceptable, while 20.8% do not trust in this at all."

https://www.worldhorsewelfare.org/news/7-in-10-uk-adults-believe-a-horses-wellbeing-should-always-take-priority-regardless-of-the-effect-on-performance

Where do you sit in relation to public acceptance of using horses in sport?



The public just don't understand horse sports, we just need to educate them to keep our SLO

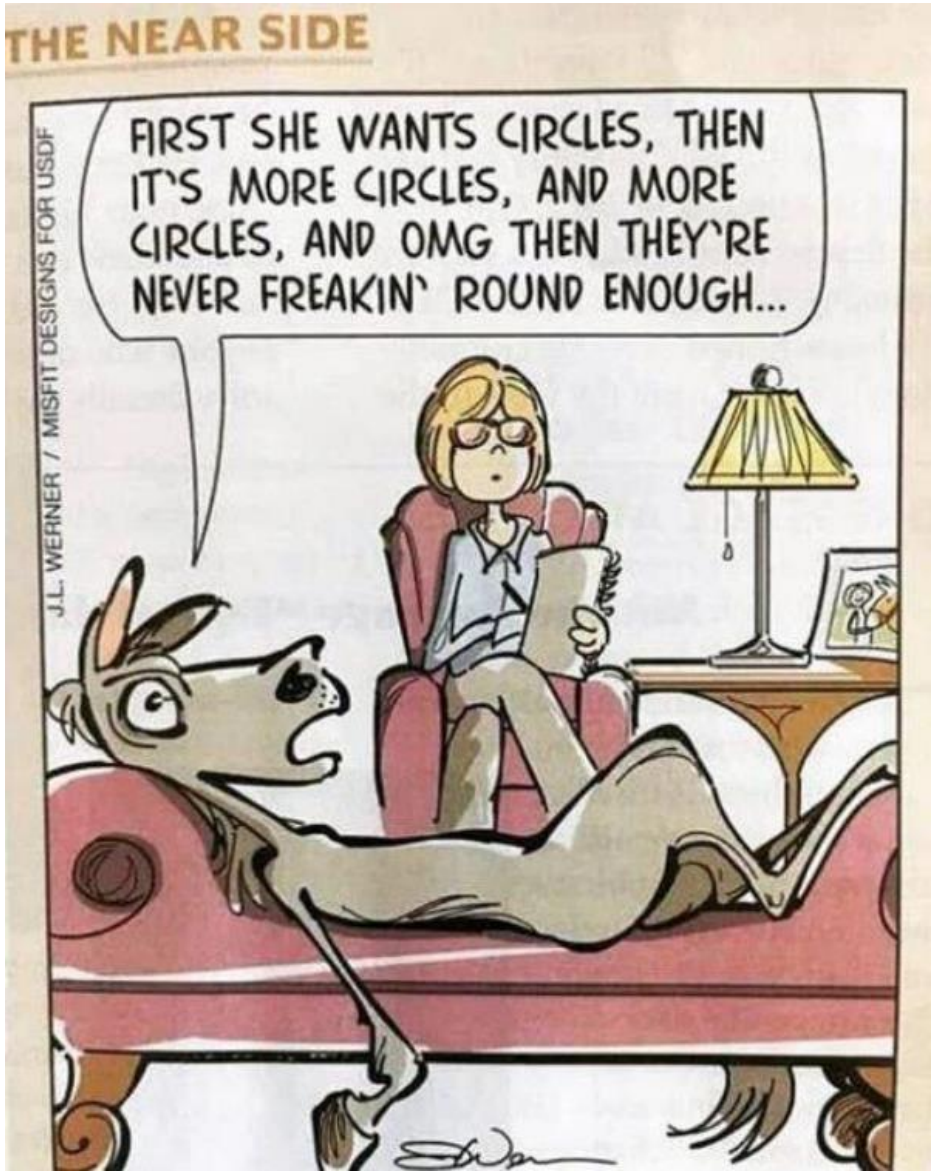
Other people need to improve their practices to maintain SLO, but I'm confident in what I'm doing

There are reasonable ethical and welfare questions about how we use animals, which we should consider seriously



There are tensions in the way we communicate about horses' willingness to participate in sport


"She got Hay or Halters?"
"Halters. Get ready To run!"


THE NEAR SIDE
J.L. WERNER / MISFIT DESIGNS FOR USDF
FIRST SHE WANTS CIRCLES, THEN IT'S MORE CIRCLES, AND MORE CIRCLES, AND OMG THEN THEY'RE NEVER FREAKIN' ROUND ENOUGH...

Common things you hear on any yard…

- She hates being caught, especially if she knows it's time to work
- He goes really lazy half way round a ride, but I know he's not tired
- He's such a sicknote, there's alw
- It's probably a bit of an ask to do … eed the points for the end of season
- She's super narky to tack up, but
- He doesn't like doing [insert spo … n a while, given I spend so much tim

……..But if we start thinking about … the rabbit hole of, should we really be riding … all?!

What examples in breeding specifically?

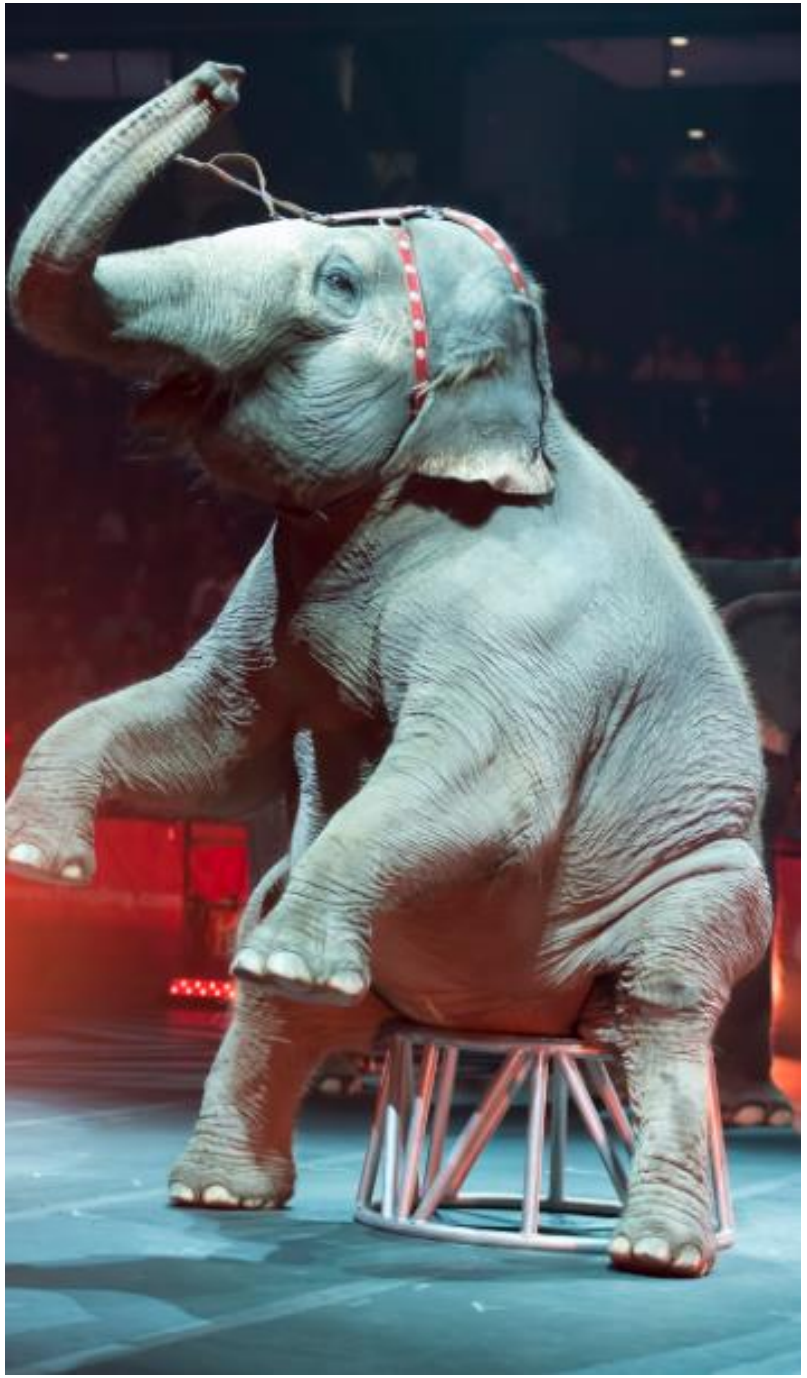
"Urgh, I'd prefer not to breed from that stallion because of his horrible temperament but I'll have to now that he's won X Y Z this year"

ARTs...?? AI/embryo transfer?



Aren't the public just silly idiots who don't understand? We know what we're doing....









This is why we can't speak to eachother effectively about horses in sport

Racing proponents:

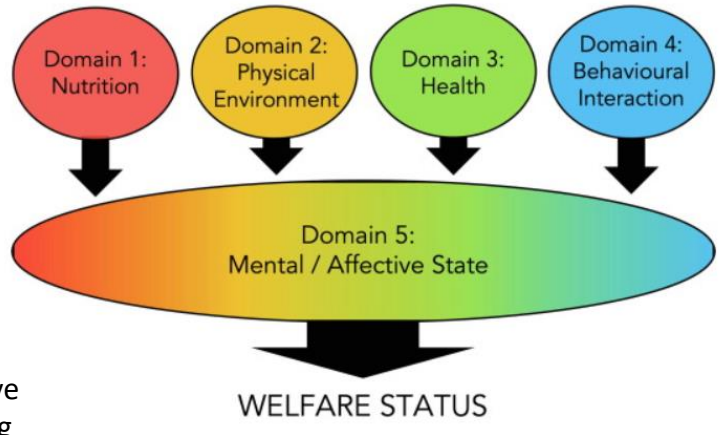
- They live like kings/5* hotels
- They are loved and cared for
- Where would they go if we didn’t race them?
- They can have accidents in the field just as much as on a racecourse
- You can’t comment if you don’t handle racehorses/you don’t understand/townies/lefties

Anti-racing proponents:

- Horses die during racing and that’s not ok
- It is wrong to use an animal for entertainment at all
- Their needs are not met
- There are serious public concerns which are not being addressed (e.g. racing young, after care etc)

Welfare is:

"Animal welfare is **a subjective state within the animal itself that reflects the integrated outcome of all its** mental or affective experiences at a given time"



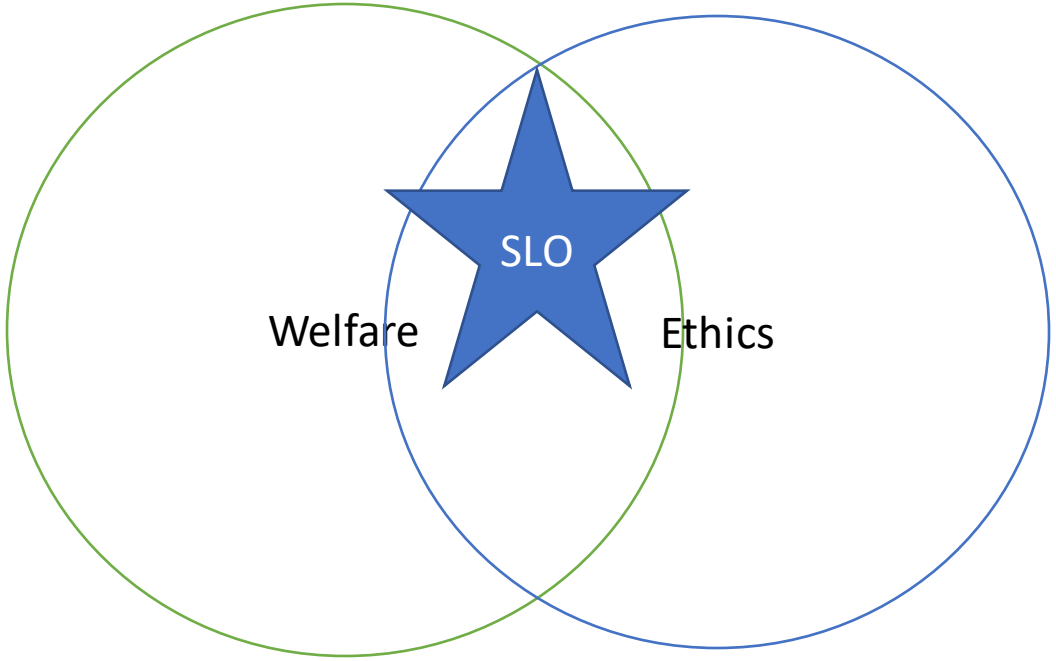
Kells, N (2021) Review: The Five Domains model and promoting positive welfare in pigs. Animal16(2022)100378

Ethics is:

Values, morals – what is "right"

- Utilitarianism
- Deontology
- Virtue ethics
- Contractarianism
- Rights-based
- Feminist ethics

Welfare and ethics are linked when we think about using horses for sport (incl breeding and actual competition)



N.b. we also have legal frameworks – for another day!!

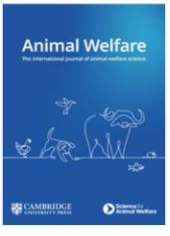


We must be careful…

Again and again, studies have found that we find reasons to support the things we're doing.

We all think what WE'RE doing is good welfare and everyone else is the problem





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Published online by Cambridge University Press: **10 February 2025**

Megan Ross, Kathryn Proudfoot, Katrina Merkies, Charlotte Lundgren and Caroline Ritter

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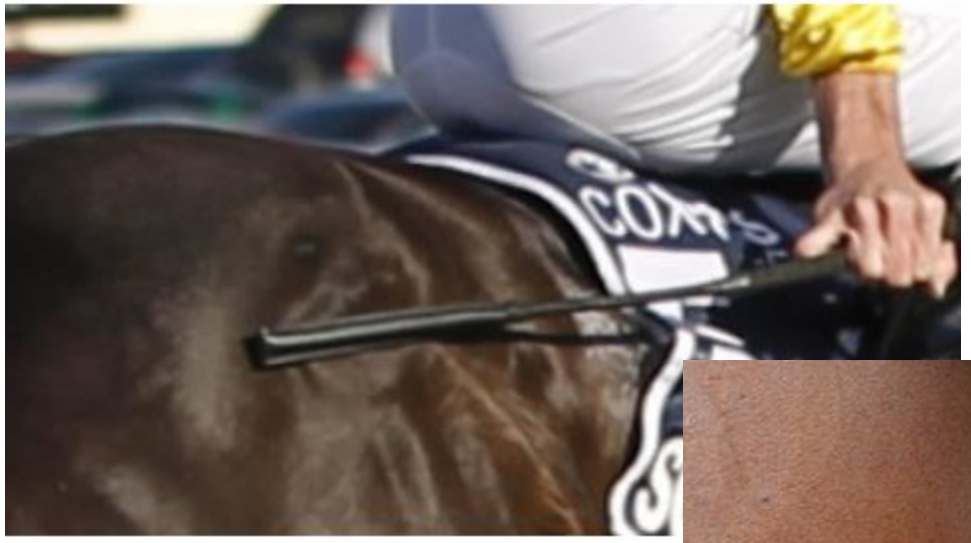
And the trouble with SLO is....

Paradoxically – if we only improve welfare practice because of the threat to our sport..... do we then deserve to keep those sports?!

Or are we changing because we love and respect horses and are invested in doing right by them?



SLO leads some aspects get a lot of attention







While others get overlooked…









What can WE all do?

Allow ourselves a little time to reflect

- *What is it truly like for the horses in my care?*
- *What am I doing well, but what could I do better? Where am I compromising?*

…. and be honest and open about change

Very useful if you haven't seen it yet….

- What is the relevant evidence around the action?
- What legislation is in place, if any?
- What are the likely harms?
- What are the likely benefits?
- Who will be impacted by the action?
- Who will benefit from the action?
- Who will experience negative effects of the action?

Are there any conflicts deciding the best outcome?

Open Access Article

An Ethical Framework for the Use of Horses in Competitive Sport: Theory and Function

by Madeleine L. H. Campbell

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Animals **2021**, *11*(6), 1725; **https://doi.org/10.3390/ani11061725**

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Testing and Refining the Ethical Framework for the Use of Horses in Sport

by Bluebell Brown [1], Jacqueline M. Cardwell [1], Kristien L. P. Verheyen [1] and Madeleine L. H. Campbell [2,*]

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Animals **2023**, *13*(11), 1821; **https://doi.org/10.3390/ani13111821**

Hopefully I haven't made you feel like this guy....

When we see SLO is an opportunity, it's a lot more interesting!

Thanks for your time today!

Drop me an email:
tfurtado@liverpool.ac.uk

