

2022

Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy: An Exploration of the Therapist's Clinical Process

Marybeth Agayev
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Marybeth Agayev

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Dorothy Scotten, Committee Chairperson, Human Services Faculty

Dr. Barbara Benoliel, Committee Member, Human Services Faculty

Dr. Eric Youn, University Reviewer, Human Services Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost

Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University

2022

Abstract

Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy: An Exploration of the Therapist's Clinical Process

by

Marybeth Agayev

MSW, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, 2011

BSW, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

May 2022

Abstract

In the existing research authors report that within the current field of equine-assisted therapy practitioners are using a number of approaches, some independently and others in affiliation with formal organizations, to treat a wide variety of issues in a very broad population. The purpose of this study was to determine what underlying thought processes guide the equine-assisted therapist's role in the clinical process. This generic qualitative study included five participants who met the criteria of having 3-5 years of experience performing equine-assisted psychotherapy with mental health populations. Participants also met the standard of being licensed or certified in accordance with their state's laws. Interviews were conducted using responsive interviewing and recorded with permission to allow for data analysis. The responses were examined using open coding by hand to break down the interviews into subtopics using a splitter technique. Three themes emerged from the data: a sense of belonging or connectedness, a sense of empowerment, and the clients' overall ability to function. These findings may support social change in the growing field of equine-assisted psychotherapy by enhancing the existing knowledge base and providing a point of reference for additional studies in this area. Also, these same findings potentially could lead to the development of a specific theory that would help guide future practice.

Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy: An Exploration of the Therapist's Clinical Process

by

Marybeth Agayev

MSW, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, 2011

BSW, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

May 2022

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the friendship and memory of Dorothy Dearborn, my former boss and mentor, who recognized my potential and gave me the opportunity to learn about the therapeutic value of horses and ponies. She understood that these animals have the ability to heal people. I think all of us who were blessed to have worked under her direction experienced this ability firsthand through her horsemanship program. She lived her life serving others through her horses; acting on both on her intuitive conscience and on her spiritual beliefs, she helped people become the best versions of themselves. Her steadfast faith and resilience have served as an inspiration to me. Although she dealt with a terminal illness and ultimately lost her battle, she lives on in the hearts of others like myself who share her love for horses.

Acknowledgments

My deepest gratitude and appreciation goes to Dr. Dorothy Scotten for helping me to succeed on my doctoral journey. Your initial time spent as my committee member, and then as my chairperson for the final leg of my dissertation has been invaluable. I also owe sincere appreciation to Dr. Barbara Benoliel for providing support early on and later serving on my committee. Your feedback and expertise definitely has contributed to my success. I am grateful as well to Dr. Harriet Meek, who served as my sounding board in the earliest stages of my work and shared with me her final time here at Walden, serving as my chairperson until her retirement. The combination of support and encouragement I have received from all of you has meant the world to me; I could not have gotten through the dissertation process without you.

I also want to acknowledge my family members who have been there every step of my way and who also have made sacrifices to allow me to chase my dream. This would not have been possible without the love and support from my husband Vasif and from our three daughters who gave me unconditional love and understanding when I had to meet the challenges of this degree. Thank you to my parents, Willis and Virginia, for instilling in me an incredible work ethic and showing me how to strive hard for the things I want in life. I also want to thank my siblings Kelly, Tracy, and Tim and their families for their hugs and encouragement when the going got tough. Last, and certainly not least, lifelong appreciation goes out to my Grandma Gladys, who departed this earth long ago, but taught me before she left that stubborn will and true grit are two of life's little blessings.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background of the Study	2
Problem Statement.....	5
Purpose of the Study.....	6
Research Question	7
Theoretical Foundation	8
Nature of the Study.....	9
Definitions.....	11
Assumptions.....	12
Scope and Delimitations	12
Limitations	13
Significance of the Study	13
Significance to Practice.....	13
Significance to Theory.....	14
Significance to Social Change	14
Summary and Transition.....	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	16
Literature Search Strategy.....	17
Theoretical Foundation	18
Theory Description and Origin	18

Gestalt Therapy.....	18
Attachment Theory	20
Existential Psychotherapy.....	22
Theory of Planned Behavior	25
Eclectic Psychotherapy	26
Psychoanalytic Theory.....	28
Theory of Multiple Intelligences	29
Literature Review.....	31
Historical Overview of Equine-Assisted Therapy	32
Hippotherapy.....	32
Therapeutic Riding.....	34
Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy	35
Main Divisions of Equine-Assisted Therapy.....	35
Treatment for Physical Issues	35
Treatment for Serious Mental Illness (SMI).....	37
Treatment for Less Severe Mental Illness	39
Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy	45
Equine- Facilitated Psychotherapy	46
Equine-Facilitated Experiential Learning.....	47
Spirituality and Equine-Facilitated Learning.....	49
Summary and Conclusions	51
Chapter 3: Research Methods	53

Research Design and Rationale	53
Role of the Researcher	56
Methodology	59
Participant Selection Logic	61
Instrumentation	62
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection	63
Data Analysis Plan	64
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	66
Credibility	67
Transferability.....	68
Dependability	68
Confirmability.....	69
Ethical Procedures	69
Summary	71
Chapter 4: Results	73
Introduction.....	73
Setting	73
Demographics	74
Data Collection	75
Data Analysis	77
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	80
Credibility	80

Transferability.....	80
Dependability.....	81
Confirmability.....	82
Results.....	82
Themes.....	83
Theme 1: Sense of Belonging.....	83
Theme 2: Empowerment.....	89
Theme 3: Client Function.....	95
Summary.....	110
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	112
Introduction.....	112
Interpretation of the Findings.....	113
Limitations of the Study.....	115
Recommendations.....	116
Implications for Social Change.....	117
Conclusion.....	118
References.....	119
Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....	146

List of Tables

Table1. Demographics of Study Participants.....75

Chapter1: Introduction to the Study

Equine-assisted psychotherapy is an increasingly popular method of treating a range of physical and mental health conditions by making use of the observed interactions between a client and a horse (Burgon, 2011; Kendall et al., 2014; Masini, 2010; Siporin, 2012). Since horses are considered to be prey animals (Lentini& Knox, 2015), they are reported to have developed heightened sensitivity to their surroundings, especially in relation to people and other animals. They react significantly to unexpected events in their environment; this responsiveness is thought to be especially useful in working with people who have a range of disabilities (Lentini& Knox, 2015). Put another way, horses may respond to client behavior in ways that can draw the therapist's attention to aspects of the client that might not be seen otherwise (Lentini& Knox, 2015).

Using the internet and library search devices (Google Scholar, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), PsychInfo, EBSCOhost Academic Search Premier), I reviewed a range of terms similar to *equine-assisted psychotherapy* and *equine-assisted therapy*. I discovered that equine therapists work with a wide range of client conditions, both physical and mental, using a variety of methods. Some use recreational activities that focus more on treating physical disabilities (Rigby & Grandjean, 2016). Other therapists focus on the mental aspects, for example treating severe mental illness such as psychosis (Nurenberget al., 2011) or less severe mental and emotional conditions such as mild anxiety, behavioral difficulties, and interpersonal problems (Saul, 2013).

In the equine-assisted therapy literature, especially in online descriptions of particular programs, approaches to many of the conditions in the emotional and relational realm are likely to be called psychotherapy. Several forms of treatment identified as equine-assisted psychotherapy may result in a range of benefits such as heightened self-awareness, improved relational skills, and an increase in self-esteem (Bachi, 2014; Brandt & Cities, 2013; Parish-Plass, 2013; Saul, 2013). A number of the therapists performing this work are affiliated with formal, accredited organizations like the Equine Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) and the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH) International; both organizations use identified theoretical models (EAGALA, 2012; Kirby, 2010).

Other therapists seem to function independently, using a wide range of individualized approaches (Gergely 2012; Kemp et al., 2014; Rugari et al., 2013; Trask, 2010). These interventions may be similar to or vary considerably from the approaches used by the formal organizations. In other words, a number of different practitioners call their individualized work equine-assisted psychotherapy, but how they understand what is taking place between their clients and the horses may vary greatly (Kendall et al., 2015; Mota, 2014).

Background of the Study

In my initial exploration of equine-assisted therapy, I began to collect articles broadly. As I reviewed a wide variety of articles related to the use of horses in a therapeutic context, I began to gain a sense of the large field about which I was reading. Upon attempting to categorize the articles by primary focus, I discovered that

many methods were being used to treat quite a number of different conditions including physical and mental issues, both severe and less severe. I scanned a wide range of resources related to work with horses and people who have some form of disability or limitation. I was eventually able to divide them into basic categories according to the type of population being served.

One group of equine-assisted therapies has the goal of improving physical functioning, often with people who have medical, physical, and developmental limitations (Angsupaisal et al., 2015; Haylock & Cantril, 2006; Rigby & Grandjean, 2016; Thompson et al., 2014). Another group focuses on people who have serious mental illness (SMI) like autism, severe depression, or schizophrenia (Cerino et al., 2011; Gabriels et al., 2012; Nurenberg, et al., 2011; Parker et al., 2014).

The largest group of people I encountered in the literature on Equine-Assisted Therapy seemed to be a subgroup working with less severe mental illness including individuals who are experiencing a range of relational issues and problems with emotional regulation. They are sometimes referred to in the mental health literature as having less severe mental illness, which is a useful distinction for my purposes in this study (Gfroerer et al., 2012). At the time of the study, treatment of this less severe mental illness category seemed to be the least well-defined of the equine-assisted psychotherapy methods, but one of the most commonly used. It seemed likely that, with further exploration among the therapists who work with people who have these less severe conditions, such as difficulties with emotional regulation, it would be prudent to identify

different ways of thinking about this work and to separate out different types of equine-assisted psychotherapy.

A number of studies pertaining to this subgroup have been conducted and help to illustrate the use of equine-assisted psychotherapy in a wide variety of ways. For example, Bachi (2013) offered insight into the applicability of attachment theory to equine-facilitated psychotherapy, and how this theory influences relational skills. She made recommendations that more research be done in this area in the future. Additionally, she evaluated the impact of an equine-facilitated prison-based program and examined how human-horse interaction might have an effect on inmate emotions and behaviors (Bachi, 2014).

In another study, Brandt & Cities (2013) explored how equine-assisted psychotherapy can be used as a complementary treatment intervention to more traditional therapy approaches. An additional example of how horses can be used to enhance general wellbeing when paired with more traditional treatment approaches is illustrated in a study involving First Nations youth who are in treatment for substance abuse (Adams et al., 2015). Burgon (2011) also identified the benefits experienced by at-risk youth who participated in equine-assisted learning/therapy, while Carlsson et al., (2015) provided insight into the practicality of using mentalizing — understanding the mental state that underlies basic behavior — to facilitate equine-assisted social work with adolescents who engage in self-harming behaviors.

Some populations do not respond as favorably to mainstream treatment approaches as others, but research is beginning to show how using equine-facilitated

body and emotion-oriented psychotherapy in a structured manner can be beneficial (Johansen et al., 2014). There have also been studies that target specific populations such as veterans who are seeking to improve the quality of their lives postcombat (Krenek, 2013). Similarly, Yorke et al., (2008) provided information about the therapeutic value of equine-human bonding in helping individuals recovering from trauma.

More- Lac et al., (2013) evaluate equine-assisted psychotherapy as a creative relational approach to treating individuals who struggle with eating disorders while Maujean et al., (2013) examined the use of horses in a therapy context and how the outcomes have a positive impact on participants. Last, Parish-Plass (2013) explored the more general topic of animal-assisted psychotherapy and how it has evolved. Those authors offered insight into theory, practice, and implications for the future that add to the significance of this study.

Problem Statement

To those interested in the development of the field, it seems important to understand how therapists performing equine-assisted psychotherapy make sense of the observed interaction between the client and horse, the behaviors of each, and how these guide the practice of the therapist. I believe this work is significant, because as equine-assisted psychotherapy becomes more recognized, it will be crucial for there to be clarity about whether equine-assisted therapists are attending to similar or different behavior and to similar or different ways of understanding that behavior. After reviewing the professional literature, I concluded that there is limited discussion of how therapists think

about the various forms, purposes, and uses of the different versions of equine-assisted psychotherapy.

Consequently, there is a need to identify more clearly the range of thought that lies behind the various approaches described by therapists to guide their practice in equine-assisted psychotherapy. This constitutes a gap in the professional literature about equine-assisted practice. The problem is, therapists appear to use different interpretations of what they observe; in the professional literature the various meanings that the therapists use to guide their work with the clients and the horses has not been researched. I believe there needs to be clarification early on to help guide practice approaches as the field continues to evolve from being experimental to an evidence-based modality.

Through conducting this study, I attempted to help answer the question of how therapists who say they are doing equine-assisted psychotherapy understand what is taking place between the client and the horse. I also attempted to address what similarities and differences existed in their perception of the work they do. I began the process of interviewing therapists who do equine-assisted psychotherapy to learn how they understand what is taking place between the client and the horse. This potentially serves as an early step in the development of equine-assisted psychotherapy as a more widely recognized method.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify how some therapists who perform equine-assisted psychotherapy understand the observed interaction between the client and the horse. The information collected was examined to help identify and make

sense of similarities and differences in the thinking of the therapists who participated in the study. This process helped determine whether particular theoretical or observational influences exist in their practice that can be used to further define what takes place in this therapy approach, and thus allow increased differentiation and definition of the various methods being used.

With the field of equine-assisted psychotherapy evolving and becoming more widely recognized as a method of therapy, I sought to clarify and facilitate the eventual development of a theoretical basis for use with clinical practice (Parish-Plass, 2013). This may also begin to fill a gap that exists in the identified knowledge base about equine-assisted psychotherapy, clarifying some aspects of the existing knowledge base and helping to identify further gaps in the understanding of this evolving method. In other words, I hoped to clarify what is known and what is not yet known about the thinking behind some of the practice methods of the therapists using equine-assisted psychotherapy. In this way I attempted to assist with a social change process that seems to be developing as the field of equine-assisted psychotherapy matures and the increasing need for theoretical guidance emerges (Parish-Plass, 2013).

Research Question

The research question was developed to identify the individual experiences and perception of the study participants and is as follows:

How do therapists who say they are doing equine-assisted psychotherapy understand what is taking place between the client and the horse?

Theoretical Foundation

Although there did not appear to be one definitive theory guiding the entire practice of equine-assisted psychotherapy currently, I thought there may be particular theoretical frameworks being used in this work that would help explain how therapists think and use their differences in perception to guide their practice with the clients and horses. Through this exploratory approach, I anticipated some common theoretical themes might emerge. These included, but were not limited to, the theory of planned behavior, which recognizes that human behavior is controlled by a number of beliefs including behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs (Ajzen, 1985; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977).

Another theory that I anticipated might influence the practice of the therapists was attachment theory (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 2013). Bretherton (1992) looked at the seminal literature and explained some of the dynamics of the relationships taking place that could be transferred to human-equine interaction. Bachi (2013) also previously explored the relevance of this theory in direct relation to equine-assisted psychotherapy. Since the primary goal of this study was to identify how the therapists doing this work think about what they are seeing and doing, any number of theories could be identified as significant to the field of equine-assisted psychotherapy and were taken into careful consideration.

This study was very exploratory in nature and as such, a definitive framework was not established. Essentially, the distinctive idea that drove this study related to the need to know more about how the therapists who perform equine-assisted psychotherapy and to understand what guides their clinical process with the client and the horse to see whether

common themes or significant differences emerged that would provide some insight to inform practice. I began the study with a guiding research question. Through general qualitative inquiry, data were collected that could be analyzed for repeated ideas and concepts. The data were then coded accordingly, so later it could be grouped into categories of concepts that would be useful in establishing connections between key elements. The same data may be useful in developing a framework for future studies that may be more explanatory in nature and predictive of specific findings.

Nature of the Study

The research design used for this study was qualitative in nature. After significant consideration, I determined using a generic qualitative approach seemed to make the most sense in order to capture a descriptive understanding of the thinking and decision making of therapists in an individual and personal manner. Although considered by some to be less established and defined than the more specific methods, selection of this general approach allows for more methodological flexibility (Kahlke & Hon, 2014, 2018). These basic qualitative, also known as interpretive, approaches are “not guided by an explicit or established set of philosophic assumptions.” (Kahlke & Hon, 2014, p. 39).

This refers to one or more of the more commonly known qualitative methodologies, such as grounded theory, ethnography and/or phenomenology (Caelli et al., 2003, p. 4; Kahlke & Hon, 2014, p. 39).

To define this sort of generic qualitative research more clearly, it is important to distinguish the two genres most commonly seen: descriptive qualitative and interpretive description (Elliott & Timulak, 2021). Descriptive qualitative can be defined as research

that is designed to create a low-inference description of a phenomenon (Kahlke & Hon, 2014, 2018). Interpretive description on the other hand, tends towards use of broad, interpretive, and what is referred to as “constructivist epistemological assumptions” (Thorne & O’Flynn-Magee, 2004, p. 49) [that take on a] “naturalistic theoretical perspective” (Kahlke & Hon, 2014, p. 41). This means the knowledge that is gathered from the participants is not absolute, but instead is based on the subjective views of the people who experience it (Kahlke & Hon, 2014, 2018). Since I was looking to gather information from therapists who perform equine-assisted psychotherapy, and this information gathering was completely subjective because it involved their perceptions of what takes place, the latter research genre was more fitting for this study.

I originally considered using the case study method for this inquiry, since it is essentially an exploratory method that allows detailed information to be collected from individual respondents in their own words (Yin, 2017). The case study is also described as a method that examines the “how” and “why” of a phenomenon that occurs in a real-world context without external manipulation among study participants (Yin, 2017, pg. 6). I believe that this method may be useful for subsequent studies as I collect the themes related to how the therapists make sense of their observations and outcomes become more clearly defined. The use of coding is common in generic qualitative studies as it allows the researcher to condense broad categories of data into groups of topics (Mihalic & Odum Institute, 2019). As a number of subgroups appear, it will allow for cross case comparison through the identification of relevant themes among participants (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2017).

A grounded theory approach was also considered (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019; Chun Tie et al., 2019; Bryant, 2021). However, as I learned more, it began to be apparent that the way the therapists think about their work is not consistent enough to be seen as more than the very beginnings of theory being formed (Levitt, 2021; Walsh et al., 2015). As such, this study sought to determine how those performing equine-assisted psychotherapy understand what they see happening between the clients and the horses and also why those therapists might choose particular interventions. I was not questioning the actual behavior of the therapists; instead, I was asking them to describe what it is they do and how they understand it. The information gathered from this study may serve as a starting point for future studies using a grounded theory approach.

Definitions

The following definitions were referenced throughout this study. They are outlined below to assist with clarity and distinction:

Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy: A form of therapy that utilizes horses as part of the therapeutic process, most often facilitated by a mental health professional. The Equine-Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) defines it as a collaborative effort between a professional who works with horses and a licensed therapist that focuses on providing treatment to a client in need of psychotherapy (EAGALA, 2012).

Equine-Facilitated Learning: An experiential learning approach that uses a planned learning experience that integrates equine-human interaction. The focus of the

learning experience is the development of life skills that will aid participants in the attainment of professional, personal, and educational goals (Path International, 2016).

Therapists: For the purpose of this study, the term therapist refers to an individual working in a therapeutic capacity with the participant and the horse. Path International (2018) defines a therapist as “a licensed mental health professional working with or as an appropriately credentialed equine professional partner with suitable equine(s) to address psychotherapy goals set forth by the mental health professional and the client” (Path International, 2018).

Assumptions

As with any study that is exploratory in nature, the topic of assumptions is approached with extreme caution. Much of what is being explored through this work is preliminary; it is not necessarily designed to be a conclusive effort, but rather a starting point for future reference. My hope is that the findings of this study may set the stage for additional studies to be done. Whatever themes might be identified through my data collection can be examined more thoroughly and used to develop assumptions for future studies- ones which may be more predictive and more likely to confirm emerging concepts.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study was limited to therapists who identified they are performing equine-assisted psychotherapy and meet the definition provided above. This was a very careful consideration given the broadness of the field and the availability of individuals performing a variety of therapeutic interventions with horses. The therapists

that were interviewed were selected from within the geographical region of the United States rather than internationally. However, they were not necessarily restricted to one or only a few states, which allowed for a broad but manageable representation.

Limitations

As with any study, limitations are to be anticipated. As previously noted, the participants in this study were solely from the United States, but not necessarily from one particular state or even one general area, like the West Coast. This limitation may have impacted the outcomes especially in relation to the international use of equine-assisted psychotherapy; while study findings may be useful in some context, they will not account for any differences in practice that may exist in other countries. With reference to personal bias, I needed to be cognizant of how my past role as a mental health therapist and my personal history of owning and working with horses in a number of settings may have impacted my ability to interpret findings and whether or not these aspects were of significant concern to my study. I have found horses to be beneficial to my personal, mental, and physical wellbeing and had to be careful not to project this assumption when interviewing participants.

Significance of the Study

Significance to Practice

Despite there being a significant amount of literature on equine-assisted psychotherapy, it appears that both a range of methods and a range of conditions exist among therapists that do not appear to have been clearly delineated (Switzer, 2016). It seems important to understand how the therapists who say they are doing equine-assisted

psychotherapy understand what is taking place between the client and the horse, and how this affects and is affected by what takes place through their interventions. Identifying similarities and differences that may exist in their approaches will help to support the ongoing development of the field of equine-assisted psychotherapy and ought to help, over time, in the evolution of systems of training for therapists and more clearly defined therapeutic methods (Parish-Plass, 2013).

Significance to Theory

Once the exploratory findings lend insight into what, if any, theories inform the current practice or therapist's performing equine-assisted psychotherapy, more can be done to evaluate whether a new emerging theory or a combination thereof could be acknowledged as a foundation for consistent training and practice methods within the field. This is much needed, as my review of the literature revealed that currently there appears to be a broad range of methods and thought processes that guide the therapists in implementing the interventions related to equine-assisted psychotherapy.

Significance to Social Change

In some ways the field of equine-assisted psychotherapy is still in its infancy with regard to the way it is being utilized and implemented as a research-based intervention. While the field seems to have generated a great deal of support and interest, there is significant evolution occurring that has only limited research supporting any consistent theory or methodology that is being utilized. This makes measuring outcomes a daunting task for those wishing to research efficacy of the interventions. The use of equine-assisted therapy as a recognized intervention in its own right, not simply as a subcomponent of

other forms of therapy, would provide access to an additional nontraditional approach for those who may not respond favorably to conventional interventions. It also would enhance what we already know about the use of horses in a therapeutic manner.

Summary and Transition

With continual growth occurring in the field of equine-assisted psychotherapy, it seems more crucial than ever to begin to identify and clarify what we know and do not know about the field itself. It was important in Chapter 2 to grant some historical significance to the prior developments that have served as precursors to the approaches we see being used today. I have given additional attention to what theoretical and conceptual influences have already been identified through scholarly research as well as which theoretical and conceptual influences have taken on additional significance as a result of my study findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This section contains a comprehensive overview of literature pertaining to the area of study: it provides information related to current studies in the field of equine-assisted psychotherapy and also to relevant theories that may influence its development. Upon exploring the topic of equine-assisted therapy, and perhaps even more specifically equine-assisted psychotherapy, the primary problem I discovered is that in both cases there appears to be a wide range of ways that the therapy is being implemented, and the role that individual therapists take in guiding this process or what lines of thinking may impact their individual practice techniques have not been evaluated. The equine-assisted psychotherapy field is still in its infancy as to its theoretical development, standards of practice, and research that evaluates outcomes and supports efficacy (Kirby, 2016). Given this beginning stage of development, it is especially important to gain insight and understanding into how therapists who say they are performing equine-assisted psychotherapy understand the observed interaction between the horse and the client, and how this understanding influences them in guiding the therapeutic process.

In order to gain a better understanding of the historical significance of the field and its evolution, I explored equine-assisted therapy as a whole and then narrowed down the scope of my study to examine equine-assisted psychotherapy more closely. While equine-assisted therapy is the term used to describe approaches that can include both physical and mental benefits to clients, equine-assisted psychotherapy is more relevant to this study as it specifically concerns the mental and emotional benefits resulting from the client/ horse interaction. It is important to distinguish the two therapies so a brief

overview will be given of each, with the focus then narrowing to equine-assisted psychotherapy and how it relates to my topic of study.

Literature Search Strategy

When I first began researching the topic of equine-assisted therapy, I really wanted to gain an understanding of all of the various ways that horses are utilized in a therapeutic capacity. I reviewed a number of articles and studies I had gathered over the past year in paper form printed out from journals. I also followed links to relevant articles colleagues had sent me in emails. In addition, I used various internet and library search devices independently to locate relevant literature for this dissertation.

These search engines included Google Scholar, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), PsychInfo, SAGE, and EBSCOhost Academic Search Premier. I also used some cross-discipline searches to locate articles in medical journals that documented benefits of this form of therapy. The following search terms were entered to locate articles: *equine-assisted psychotherapy, equine-facilitated psychotherapy, equine-assisted therapy, hippotherapy, equine-assisted activities, therapy horses, equine therapy, therapeutic riding, and animal-assisted therapy.*

Searches were conducted regarding the theoretical foundation of equine-assisted psychotherapy and also qualitative research approaches related to it. These included: *attachment theory, existential psychotherapy, gestalt, psychodynamic theory, theory of planned behavior, eclectic psychotherapy, grounded theory, case study, generic qualitative design, and qualitative interviewing techniques.*

Theoretical Foundation

Theory Description and Origin

A number of theories have been used in conjunction with the implementation of animal-assisted therapy, some of which can be more specifically applied to equine-assisted therapy and equine-assisted psychotherapy. These include gestalt therapy, attachment theory, existential psychotherapy, theory of planned behavior, eclectic psychotherapy, psychoanalytic theory, and theory of multiple intelligences. While some are only briefly mentioned, others have entire studies devoted to the use of specific theories to guide interventions. An overview of theories that have been documented as relevant to informing practice efforts of equine therapists is provided in the sections below.

Gestalt Therapy

The use of gestalt therapy in conjunction with equine-assisted psychotherapy is well documented (Kirby, 2010; Kirby, 2016; Lac, 2016). It stems from combined work by Fritz Perls, Laura Perls, and Paul Goodman in the 1940s and 1950s (Moss, 1999). It is based on the idea that humans can develop self-regulation skills in response to their sense of personal responsibility as well as to their social and environmental experiences (Kirby, 2010). Frederick Perls wrote extensively about the characteristics of gestalt psychology as compared to gestalt therapy in his autobiography *In and Out of the Garbage Pail* and noted that gestalt therapy is a form of psychotherapy that is phenomenological in nature (Perls et al., 1951). It focuses on both the exploration and the causes of behaviors rather

than simply trying to modify them, and this in turn increases self-awareness(Perls et al., 1951).

Gestalt therapy, when used in relation to equine-assisted psychotherapy, is essentially an experiential form of psychotherapy that is both client-centered and focuses on the therapeutic experience that is occurring between the client and the horse in the present moment (Kirby, 2010; Kirby, 2016). As noted in the literature, gestalt therapy approaches with equine-assisted psychotherapy have had a number of different applications. One example has been its noted success as a mental health intervention/promotion when working therapeutically with children who have experienced intra-family violence (Schultz et al., 2007). Other examples include improving conflict resolution among adolescents (Thomas, 2017), assisting veterans with PTSD to overcome marital challenges (Skidmore, 2018), and improving life skills (Greve, 2021). While still considered to be an experiential approach to traditional psychotherapy, equine-assisted psychotherapy is very similar to gestalt therapy because it centers on the use of body language: reflective behavior between the horse and the child becomes the foundation of the intervention (Schultz et al., 2007).

Other authors have cited the usefulness and similarities of equine-assisted psychotherapy to gestalt therapy as well. In the most recent literature by Lee and Makela (2018), the authors discuss useful strategies for equine-assisted psychotherapy for practice within the field of social work, while Hallberg (2017) focuses on the clinical aspects of using horses within the human healthcare field. Kemp et al., (2014) explore this briefly in their program evaluation study on the use of equine-facilitated therapy with

children and adolescents who have been victims of sexual abuse. They noted that the EAGALA model uses a person-centered approach that closely resembles both gestalt therapy and existential therapy (Kemp et al., 2014).

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory was initiated by the work of John Bowlby. He suggested that children form biological attachments with others as a means of survival; he carried this theory over to developmental aspects of adult attachments (Bowlby, 1988, 2008). His work also provides insight into the importance of both long and short-term relationships and how they influence overall human development (Bretherton, 1992). In 1979, Bowlby published a selection of lectures from two previous decades under the title *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds*. In his book, Bowlby goes into significant depth regarding similar ideas related to attachment theory and offers an explanation of the contextual differences. He offers clarification and expands on the distinctive features of the theory and the relational aspects that apply to human relationships (Bowlby, 2012).

While Bowlby tended toward an “all or nothing” mindset regarding the relevance of attachments (Bowlby, 1969), additional research by developmental psychologist Mary Ainsworth throughout the 1960s and 1970s added to the development of attachment theory and defined differences in the types of attachment people experience (Ainsworth, 1989). Ainsworth defines an attachment as “an affectional bond” that can be seen in a variety of relationships (Ainsworth, 1989). She also recognized that children develop different patterns of attachment dependent upon their early childhood experiences; these experiences then in turn influence their expectations for relationships into

adulthood(Bretherton, 1992). Based on her research, Ainsworth identified three different classifications for attachment: anxious-avoidant attachment, anxious-ambivalent attachment, and secure attachment (Ainsworth,1978). A fourth attachment style known as disorganized- insecure attachment was later identified by researchers Solomon andMain (1986).

Disorganized attachment as it relates to Ainsworth's studies involving children can be described as the lack of a clear attachment pattern with the child often exhibiting a confusing combination of behaviors (Ainsworth, 1978). Anxious-ambivalent attachment, while relatively uncommon, is characterized by the child's inability to depend on his or her caregiver (Ainsworth, 1978). A secure attachment is defined by Ainsworth (1978) as a child who is secure in the ability to rely on his or her caregiver. While attachment theory is primarily applied to studies on childhood development, it became more applicable to adults in the 1980s when additional research by Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver (1987) explored three styles of attachment pertaining to adult attachment behavior that mirror prior work by Ainsworth and Bowlby.

Many studies have explored the usefulness of attachment theory to equine-assisted psychotherapy. One such example focuses on the work of Vincent and Farkas (2017). They look at the role this theory takes in conjunction with social work practice. Bowlby affirms that attachment theory focuses on understanding how people internalize their interpersonal interactions, and how they react and respond to others emotionally and otherwise. This is something that is transferrable to human/ horse interaction(Vincent & Farkas, 2017). Other authors have looked at the correlation between theory and practice

with attachment theory being given significant consideration. Burgon et al., (2018) took a closer look at the use of equine-assisted therapy with young people who were experiencing psychosocial issues as a result of abuse and/or neglect in early childhood. They recognized that, although some children may have not been able to form appropriate, secure bonds with caregivers from an early age, they are still capable of developing attachment skills later in life through the use of such therapy approaches (Burgon et al., 2018). This affirms the importance of horses being used therapeutically to help individuals develop bonding skills.

Existential Psychotherapy

Soren Kierkegaard, who has been referenced as the father of existentialist thinking, was once quoted as saying “I can be understood only after my death” (Kierkegaard, 1960, 1967). Existential psychotherapy initially began during the nineteenth century as a result of work done by Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche: both of them disagreed with the prominent ideologies that were popular at the time (May & Yalom, 2000). According to Hwa Yol Jung (1969), who contrasts and compares Confucian philosophy with existentialism, Kierkegaard takes a very subjective view towards human existence. Kierkegaard experienced a great deal of ridicule and isolation for his belief that people greatly misunderstood and to some degree even abused both Christian dogma and what was referred to as ‘objectivity’ of science in an attempt to avoid experiencing anxiety as part of their human experience (Kierkegaard, 1960, 1967; May & Yalom, 2000). Nietzsche, who is known for his statement “God is dead”, believed that the notion of God created limitation for people who might otherwise live life

according to free will, that is, free of moral and societal constraints (Nietzsche, 1968). It is from this line of thinking that the existential themes of personal responsibility, courage, freedom, and choice were introduced (May & Yalom, 2000).

Swiss psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger, a well-known pioneer in the field of existential psychology also made great contributions to the development of psychotherapy with the help of Needleman (1965), who assisted with translating some of Binswanger's best known work. Binswanger referred to it as "basically no more than an attempt to bring the patient to a point where he can 'see' the manner in which the totality of the human existence or 'being in the world' is structured and to see at which of its junctures he has overreached himself" (Binswanger, 1963; Needleman, 1965, p. 348, 349). He identified the overall goal of psychotherapy as being able to bring the patient back from a state of defined extravagance and essentially "back down to earth" and within touch with reality in the safest manner possible (Binswanger, 1963; Needleman, 1965).

A number of early practitioners are present in the seminal literature demonstrating the applicability of existential psychology and analysis. The work of Viktor Frankl (1986), the founder of logotherapy, a form of existential analysis, had a significant impact on the evolution of existential work and a humanistic approach to psychology that later influenced the importance of spirituality in clinical practice (Puchalski, 2006). Frankl identified three layers that comprise the dimensions of a human personality: psychological (psychic), spiritual (noetic), and biological (somatic) (Frankl, 1986; Podolsky, 1962; Reitingger, 2015).

Much emphasis is placed on the spiritual domain: Frankl, along with other authors, has recognized that human beings are primarily spiritual beings, more so than the product of biological and psychological mechanisms, and thus have the ability to act responsibly and freely through self-transcendence and self-detachment (Frankl, 1986; Reitinger, 2015). These spiritual qualities which guide behavior show some relevancy to animal behavior. Frankl also noted in his writings that animals are able to feel anxiety and respond to it accordingly without necessarily thinking about the response prior. In contrast, human consciousness is necessary to convert a sense of failure in a physical sense into feelings of guilt prior to it manifesting (Frankl, 1986; Podolsky, 1962).

Additionally, articles have been published that examine the use of existential psychotherapy approaches with equine-assisted psychotherapy. An example of this is Lac's (2017) study in which the author looks at the use of an existential- integrative aspect of equine therapy for treatment of anorexia nervosa. This study relates closely to the development of the human- equine relational development (HERD) approach to therapy, which was developed by Veronica Lac, PhD, the executive director of The HERD Institute located in New Albany, Ohio (Lac, 2017). Lac's institute offers specific training and guidance for equine facilitated psychotherapy and learning (EFPL) practitioners wishing to implement such therapeutic approaches and supports the progress towards equine-assisted psychotherapy becoming recognized as an empirically based form of treatment and educational modality (Lac, 2017).

Theory of Planned Behavior

This theory, developed by Icek Ajzen, essentially focuses on the link between human beliefs and their behavior (Ajzen, 1985). It explores how an individual's behaviors and even the intentions behind such behaviors are a direct result of their perceived behavioral control, subjective norms and their attitude towards the behaviors (Ajzen, 1985). It stems from preliminary work done by Martin Fishbein with collaboration from Ajzen on the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977). Studies based on this confirmed that there were high correlations between subjective norms and attitudes to behavioral intentions as well as between the behavioral intentions and the actual behaviors (Ajzen, 1985). Interestingly, actual behaviors as well as the noted intentions are highly predictable when considering norms, attitudes, and perceived notions about behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991).

This makes sense not only in relation to human behavior, but also in relation to animal behavior (Miller, 2017). The theory is derived from the basic idea that intention to perform the behavior creates motivation for the behavior to occur (Steinmetz et al., 2016). In addition to this, the ability for an individual to transition their beliefs and corresponding motivation into action is largely dependent on their ability to self-regulate (Quinton & Brunton, 2017). Understanding these salient beliefs, whether they are positive or negative, help us predict outcomes related to behavior (Lesté-Lasserre, 2018).

Humans as well as animals have the ability to store control beliefs and behavioral patterns in their memory (Steinmetz et al., 2016). Since horses are herd animals, they rely largely on intuitive functioning to guide their behavior. It is through their trust and

attachment with other members of the herd that their safety is ensured when a perceived threat is encountered (Dampsey, 2017). Humans also store normative beliefs, something that animals are less aware of in relation to their social interaction, as they are not generally susceptible to social pressures that may influence their behavior (Steinmetz et al., 2016).

Eclectic Psychotherapy

This form of psychotherapy is based upon the use of multiple therapeutic approaches to meet the diverse needs of a client. Historically, many forms of psychotherapy have been implemented as stand-alone interventions; in contrast, this kind of psychotherapy utilizes a number of combinations. Technical eclectic psychotherapy methods, for example multimodal therapy, which was developed by Arnold Lazarus during the 1960s, solely focuses on use of multiple techniques without regard to their theoretical backgrounds (Lazarus, 2002). Initially referred to as multimodal behavioral therapy, then simply as multimodal therapy, it centered on the idea that humans are biological beings, or more scientifically, also referenced as neurophysiologic/ biochemical entities (Lazarus, 1989). Humans have the ability to act and react, think independently, use imagination, interact with others, experience sensory and affective responses, some of which are transferrable to human/ animal behavior and interaction (Lazarus, 1989).

An example of this can be seen when utilizing equine-assisted therapy approaches with prisoners, a population that is known for a myriad of self-regulation issues and a lack of responsiveness to conventional therapy approaches. Rosie Meek, a London professor who has studied the use of the equine-based curriculum, The Horse Course (THC),

indicated in her study that prisoners who participated were able to increase their confidence, attention span, ability to persevere, self-efficacy, and skills related to self-regulation, as well as self-relaxation skills (Meek, 2012). The outcomes of the study also showed a statistically significant drop in recidivism rates: 36% for those in the curriculum participation cohort—a 27% drop from the predicted reoffending rate of 63% (Meek, 2012).

More recent examples of studies exploring eclectic theory and the use of horses for therapeutic interventions have also been published. Carlsson (2016) examined how these combined approaches paired with equine-assisted social work were an effective means of treating self-harming adolescents. Additionally, Turner (2018) found in her study that 12.5% of providers who were performing equine-facilitated therapy utilized eclectic theory to understand their clients.

In the late 1970s prescriptive eclectic psychotherapy was developed by Richard Dimond and his colleagues as a way to create individualized treatment plans for each client (Dimond et al., 1978). Then by the early 1990s another approach known as systematic eclectic psychotherapy was developed by Larry Beutler and his colleagues. In this approach, the therapist selects appropriate therapy interventions based on four key areas: relationship variables, the context of treatment, individual characteristics of each client, and specific strategies that are individually selected for each client based on his or her unique needs (Beutler & Consoli, 1992). A combination of these techniques offers individualized treatment when one single method might otherwise lack effectiveness. A

final comment: behavioral therapy and psychotherapy are seen as basically indistinguishable (Lazarus, 1976;Smith, 1977).

Psychoanalytic Theory

Sigmund Freud is commonly known as the founding father of psychoanalysis, a clinical method used in the treatment of mental illness that also developed into a theory used to explain human behavior. Psychoanalytic theory, perhaps one of Freud's most important contributions to the field of psychology in the late nineteenth century, can be defined as a theory of personality development and organization (Elliott, 2015). It can be broken down into five key areas: dynamic, economic, developmental, structural, and adaptive (Freud, 1964). Freud believed that using psychoanalysis to release suppressed and repressed emotions would allow patients to become aware of unconscious thoughts and this would allow the psychosis to be effectively treated (Elliott, 2015). Psychodynamic theory, which emerged in the early 20th century as a result of Freud's ongoing studies, involves a more systematic study of the underlying psychology related to human feelings, thoughts, and emotions. It continues to be a useful approach to psychotherapy (Shedler, 2010).

Swiss Psychoanalyst Peter Fonagy, along with Anthony Bateman, has done additional work related to psychoanalytic theory that focuses more on the concept of mentalization as a useful treatment process. Mentalization is defined as "a process, by which we make sense of each other and ourselves, implicitly and explicitly, in terms of subjective states and mental processes" (Fonagy & Bateman, 2010, p. 12). Their work focused on three key areas that relate to the concept of *mentalization*: the therapeutic

stance, the aim of the interventions, and the transference (Fonagy & Bateman, 2010). The latter concept of transference is most relevant in relation to equine-assisted psychotherapy, since the interaction between the participant and the horse results largely from indirect communications and nonverbal cues.

The use of psychoanalytic theory in conjunction with equine-assisted psychotherapy approaches has also been discussed in the literature. For example, psychoanalysis has been used in conjunction with equine-therapy approaches to treat adults with a history of trauma and personality issues (Kovacs et al., 2020). Another example of this was a study done by Tuuvas et al., (2017). They explored how former participants of equine-assisted psychotherapy experienced the relationship they had with the horse they were in therapy with several years after they completed therapy. The data analysis and study findings concluded that the horses were still perceived to have been the most impactful relationship the participants experienced during the time they were active in treatment. Their family members attributed their improvements during treatment to be directly related to their relationships with the horses (Tuuvas et al., 2017). While psychodynamic theory continues to evolve from its psychoanalytic basis, it continues to remain one of the most adaptive, inclusive and versatile approaches used by therapists (Fulmer, 2018).

Theory of Multiple Intelligences

In this theory developed by Howard Gardner, the author recognizes that each individual has his/her own unique learning style and related ways that he/she tends to learn new information and skills most effectively (Gardner, 1983). Gardner's work which

began with his studies of developmental psychology and the work of Jean Piaget, carries into his most recent work and asserts that intelligence can be measured in more ways than just through IQ ratings (Gardner, 2020). In collaborative research done between Gardner and Hatch (1989), they looked more closely at how the theory of multiple intelligences could be applied in educational settings and inform teaching practices. The authors originally identified seven types of intelligence that can be assessed (Gardner & Hatch, 1989).

Ongoing work by Gardner eventually led to the expansion of these types of intelligence from seven to nine: logical- mathematical, naturalist, existential, musical, interpersonal, linguistic, bodily/ kinesthetic, intra-personal, and spatial (Gardner, 2016). Logical- mathematical means being smart with numbers and reasoning, while naturalist means one is nature smart (Gardner, 2016). Existential refers to an individual being life smart, interpersonal to being people smart, and intra-personal means one is self-aware or self-smart (Gardner, 2016). The remaining types include musical, which means sound smart, bodily/ kinesthetic, which refers to being body smart, spatial, which refers to being picture smart, and linguistic meaning one is word smart (Gardner, 2016).

Gardner also shared in a recent research publication “Of Human Potential, A 40-year Saga” that much of his training has been in social sciences, including sociology and anthropology, however his ability to look critically at the constructs of human potential has come from his ability to think and write from the mindset of a psychologist (Gardner, 2020). This may be an additional point to consider when looking at equine-assisted

psychotherapy as this theory seems relevant when evaluating human behavior and their response to psychotherapy techniques.

In fact, the use of Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence in combination with equine-facilitated learning has previously been considered. One program known as Central Kentucky Riding for Hope (CKRH) specializes in providing both challenging and motivating equine-assisted activities to children with cognitive, emotional/behavioral, and physical disabilities (CKRH, 2018). In order to maximize outcomes (CKRH, 2018), the Kentucky Program of Studies helped in determining that the program would use aspects of Gardner's multiple intelligences to address multiple learning styles of the children who attend treatment (CKRH, 2018).

Literature Review

As I first started to explore equine-assisted psychotherapy I began to collect articles broadly. I soon discovered that a range of methods were being used to treat quite a number of different conditions including both physical and mental health related issues. I attempted to scan through the range of resources for which work with horses and people with some form of disability or limitation was being used. I have divided these conditions according to their intended use in the following discussion of the background of equine-assisted therapy as a whole. It was through my broad search of the literature concerned with equine-assisted therapy that I began to gain a sense of the large field I was reading about. I especially noticed the largest variety of types focused on the mental and emotional conditions treated through equine-assisted psychotherapy. This helped me to see how it might be further subdivided for a manageable study.

Historical Overview of Equine-Assisted Therapy

In the next section, I will identify several main subdivisions of equine-assisted therapy. To begin, I will give a basic historical overview of how equine-assisted therapy, meaning the use of horses for therapeutic purposes, has evolved so far. I will recognize the terms associated with the various types of therapy, and the defining factors of each to help distinguish the different ways horses are being used therapeutically in the field. This information also will help to establish the timeline and sequence of emergence for equine-assisted psychotherapy.

Hippotherapy

Hippotherapy is defined as a form of physical therapy that uses the horse as a therapeutic tool to improve balance, posture, fine and gross motor skills, and overall coordination for its participants (Thompson, Ketcham, & Hall, 2014). Physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speechlanguage pathologists joined together in forming the American Hippotherapy Association based on their utilization of horses and their basic movement for common therapeutic means (AHA, 2014). They recognized the usefulness of horses when paired with physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech-language therapy for primarily the physical health issues, but later benefits related to cognitive and emotional wellbeing were also recognized (AHA, 2014).

Some existing literature points to the usefulness of this form of equine therapy. In a study conducted by Park et al., (2014), outcomes were evaluated for children who participated in a form of hippotherapy using a horse riding simulator. This allowed researchers to focus solely on the physical benefits. Twenty-six children with cerebral

palsy were split into two groups that participated in the same exercise routine using the simulator for 1 hour a day, 3 times per week for the duration of 12 weeks (Park et al., 2014). In the study outcomes, the authors showed that both groups experienced statistically significant improvement in their static and dynamic balance, although no significant difference was noted between the two groups regarding their participation (Park et al., 2014).

In another study, that also utilized a riding simulator, the authors focused on the physical benefits, such as gross motor function, experienced by 34 children with cerebral palsy (Lee et al., 2014). The children in this study participated in hippotherapy sessions twice a week for a 45-minute session aboard the simulator for the 8-week period during which the study was conducted. The outcomes of this study were very similar to the previously mentioned one: children showed marked improvement in overall physical function and gross motor skills (Lee et al., 2014).

In other studies, researchers evaluated not only the primary physical benefits, but also the psychosocial and emotional benefits of children with cerebral palsy who participated in hippotherapy alongside their caregivers. Eight children participated in the study and were involved in weekly 30-minute sessions for 10 consecutive weeks during which time the researchers evaluated both their gross motor and psychosocial function (Jang et al., 2016). In the results of the study, the authors concluded that, while there were noted improvements in the physical function of the children, the psychosocial and emotional parameters remained consistent throughout (Jang et al., 2016). While hippotherapy does focus primarily on physical function, and the effectiveness of it has

been supported through many more studies than the ones outlined above, additional studies focusing on the mental and emotional benefits gained with the use of real horses for hippotherapy would likely enhance the overall benefits of this form of therapy.

Therapeutic Riding

This method of utilizing horses in a therapeutic manner for individuals with physical health impairments focuses on how actually riding the horses has positive outcomes. Most widely recognized in affiliation with Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International, it incorporates a certification process for instructors from a wide variety of backgrounds, some in psychotherapy (PATH International, 2013). Therapeutic riding has been adapted for use with a wide variety of participants: this is illustrated in the published literature.

In one study the impact on autistic children was evaluated to see if regular participation in therapeutic riding would exhibit positive results. Eight children ages 8-16 years of age attended twenty-four 45-minute sessions (García-Gómez et al., 2014). The behavior assessment system for children (BASC) and a standard quality of life questionnaire were utilized to measure outcomes. The results showed both a reduction in aggressive behavior as well as an increase in quality of life indicators such as social skills, adaptive skills, and leadership skills (García-Gómez et al., 2014).

In another study the question was asked whether or not therapeutic riding would improve the balance of older adults in shared living communities (Homnick et al., 2015). Due to the frequency of falls among this particular elder population, and previous studies showing significant improvements in balance among individuals with cerebral

palsy, it made sense to evaluate the usefulness of therapeutic riding for them (Homnick et al., 2015). Interestingly, while no negative side effects occurred resulting from participation in the trial and results showed some improvement in balance, the measurable outcomes never reached statistical significance (Homnick et al., 2015).

Conclusions from the study indicated future studies should be completed with a larger sample size to support therapeutic riding as a form of exercise and a means of improving balance in older adults (Homnick et al., 2015).

Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy

Equine-assisted psychotherapy, the use of horses as an experiential form of mental health treatment, developed as a direct result of the recognition within the field of equine-assisted therapy that mental health was becoming a notable area of focus.

Considered by the most recent research publications to be an emerging approach, it is still in its early stages of infancy, since the first empirical research on equine-assisted psychotherapy was published as recently as 2005 (Lee et al., 2016; Shultz, 2005). Unlike hippotherapy which focuses primarily on the physical needs of participants, equine-assisted psychotherapy is focused primarily on the mental and emotional needs and use within the mental health setting. It does not generally involve riding the horse (Wang, 2017).

Main Divisions of Equine-Assisted Therapy

Treatment for Physical Issues

One group of Equine-Assisted Therapies is aimed at improving physical functioning, often with people who have medical, physical, and developmental

limitations. For example, in one research study the authors sought to determine if the use of adaptive riding could improve the overall postural and gross motor control of children with cerebral palsy (Angsupaisal et al., 2015). The data they collected provided information about the feasibility of therapist-designed and adapted therapeutic riding. The protocol which they adapted and implemented had a positive outcome for the six children who participated: there were marked improvements in their postural mobility (Angsupaisal et al., 2015).

In another study by Haylock and Cantril (2006), the researchers explored the usefulness of supporting the recovery process for individuals recovering from cancer utilizing horses as therapists. While there were physical impacts, mental impact was noted as well. The authors also speak candidly of the profound impact the horses had on individuals experiencing terminal forms of cancer and facing the end stage of their lives (Haylock & Cantril, 2006). It has been suggested that additional studies should be conducted to examine the ability of horses to serve as comfort companions in terminal care and to support recovery efforts for treatable physical illnesses (Haylock & Cantril, 2006).

In still other studies, researchers examined the physical benefits of equine-assisted activities and therapies on improving physical function of the participants. In a study on the use of hippotherapy in children who have developmental delays, researchers explored the level of impact on their physical functioning (Thompson et al., 2014). During the study the researchers also looked at whether there were any resulting psychological benefits. The outcomes showed that the use of hippotherapy has useful implications for

improvement of physical health function as well as general quality of life (Thompson et al., 2014).

Rigby and Grandjean(2016) concluded that, while the literature supports the ideathat equine-assisted activities have significant physical health benefits, more studies are needed to determine what exact mode and frequency is deemed most effective (Rigby &Grandjean, 2016). In many of the articles, although researchers were exploring outcomes on physical health, notable benefits to the participants' quality of life were found. Additionally, findings indicate that more focus needs to be placed on the physiological basis for providing the outcomes and level of effectiveness outlined in the literature (Rigby &Grandjean, 2016).

Treatment for Serious Mental Illness (SMI)

Another group of articles focused on people who have SMIlkeautism, severe depression, and schizophrenia.SMI can occur among people of any age group and is characterized by a disruption in “a person’s thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others, and daily functioning” (Downes et al., 2013, pg. 1). It can also relate in some cases, as with schizophrenia, to the presence of psychotic episodes which may require acute approaches such as hospitalization in order to assist the individual with stabilization (Downes et al., 2013).

In a study by Cerino et al.,(2011), the researchers evaluated the use of therapeutic riding as a non-conventional psychiatric rehabilitation approach for individuals with schizophrenia.A group of 24 subjects participated in a year-long therapeutic riding program and were evaluated both pre and post treatment. The outcomes showed a marked

reduction in negative symptoms, consistent stability, and reduced hospitalizations among participants, and what the authors referred to as “constant disease remission” for both chronic and early onset participants (Cerino et al., 2011, p. 413).

A more generalized pilot study was conducted that addressed how equine-assisted psychotherapy can be used to enhance treatment for individuals with severe chronic psychiatric disorders. Nurenberg et al., (2011) looked at how animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is being used more frequently to treat more severe mental illnesses, including cases involving aggression and severe trauma, in individuals who may not have responded favorably to traditional therapy approaches previously. The researchers developed an animal-assisted therapy protocol that they worked on implementing at a 500-bed state psychiatric hospital located in New Jersey. Based on the research they reviewed comparing the use of dogs and horses for therapy, the use of larger animals, such as horses seemed to reduce some of the physical harm related risks associated with treating the chronically violent or highly regressed patients (Nurenberg et al., 2011).

A pilot study was done in which researchers evaluated the effects of therapeutic horseback riding on school-age children and adolescents who were diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Gabriels et al., 2012). Social functioning is one area the disorder impacts severely, along with communication impairments and a broad range of emotional and behavioral issues (Gabriels et al., 2012). In the study, 42 children ages 6-16 years old engaged in 10 weekly sessions. In their results, the authors indicated that the use of therapeutic riding with the participants reduced negative behaviors and resulted in significant improvements in their self-regulation skills (Gabriels et al., 2012).

Another pilot study, which focused on the use of animal-assisted therapy for veterans with serious mental illness, found that exposure to a variety of animals in a number of different community settings had beneficial outcomes. The researchers found that the outings involving the animals resulted in a marked reduction in anxiety and an increase in communication between the veteran and the clinicians (Pollock et al., 2017). Overall, although this particular study was small, researchers found results that were favorable: some of the veterans wanted to continue to visit, or even volunteer to work or spend time with the animals on an ongoing basis (Pollock et al., 2017).

Lastly, in a study by Parker et al., (2014), the authors evaluated the implementation of cognitive behavior therapy approaches in collaboration with other alternative therapies for treating depression. The researchers reviewed a collection of original studies along with the related quantitative analyses to evaluate the use of cognitive behavioral therapy approaches in conjunction with horses to treat depression (Parker et al., 2014). The authors concluded that while the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy as a standalone approach to treating depression is questionable, it may be more effective when combined with supplemental approaches (Parker et al., 2014).

Treatment for Less Severe Mental Illness

The largest group of people I encountered in the literature on equine-assisted therapy seems to be a subgroup working with less severe mental illness in individuals who are experiencing a range of relational issues and problems with emotional regulation. They are sometimes referred to in the broad mental health literature as having

less severe mental illness, which is a useful distinction for my purposes in this study (Gfroerer et al., 2012). At present, treatment of this “less severe mental illness” category seems the least well-defined of the equine-assisted psychotherapy methods but one of the most commonly used. It seems likely that, with further exploration among the therapists who work with people who have these less severe conditions, it will be fairly easy to identify different ways of thinking about this work. Hopefully, with further clarification, theories, observational methods, and other ways of separating out different types of equine-assisted psychotherapy will be identified also.

In one study the discussion centered on how equine-assisted learning (EAL) can be beneficial to the general wellbeing of First Nations youth who are in treatment for substance abuse. The researchers focused even more closely on female youth who abuse volatile substances commonly found and easily accessible such as paint thinner, glue, and gasoline (Adams et al., 2015). Equine-assisted learning takes a more hands-on approach to therapy. However, it does not utilize riding the horses. The horse takes the role of the teacher, while a facilitator helps guide the sessions to maximize feedback to the participants as a result of their interaction with the horses (Adams et al., 2015). The youth who participated noted marked improvements to their overall wellbeing, especially with regard to their physical and spiritual wellbeing (Adams et al., 2015).

Additional studies have been conducted on the use of equine-assisted therapy approaches with at-risk youth. Burgon (2011) identifies the benefits experienced by at-risk youth who participated in equine-assisted learning/therapy. These seven young people were part of his ethnographic study that followed such themes as self-confidence,

empathy, self-esteem, a sense of mastery, self-efficacy. Burgon's study also followed the ability of the youth to model behaviors such as being confident, calm, and exhibiting leadership the horse has reinforced in them through their interaction (Burgon, 2011). In the results gathered from this small sample size, researchers indicated that the youth gained some level of psychosocial benefit as evidenced by improvements in self-esteem, confidence, a greater sense of empathy, and better relational skills. The author suggests that additional research should be conducted to affirm the benefits of at-risk youth participating in equine-assisted activities (Burgon, 2011).

While in the previously mentioned study the researchers briefly explored the impact of equine-assisted activities on relational skills, other researchers have taken a closer look at this correlation. Bachi, (2013) who offered insight into the applicability of attachment theory to equine-facilitated psychotherapy, explored how it influences relational skills in certain populations and made recommendations for future applications. Her 2014 study evaluates the impact of an equine-facilitated prison-based program and examines how human-horse interaction can have an effect on inmate emotions and behaviors (Bachi, 2014). More recently she worked collaboratively with another well-known researcher to evaluate the use of relational therapy with children using animal-assisted psychotherapy (Bachi & Parish-Plass, 2017).

In additional studies that focus on implications for practice, researchers explored how equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EFP) can be used as a complementary treatment intervention along with more traditional therapy approaches (Brandt & Cities, 2013). Although the authors talk extensively about animal-assisted therapy (AAT) they

also delve into discussion about equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EFP) and its efficacy in relation to empirically supported therapy interventions (Brandt & Cities, 2013).

Although they note EFP is more widely used, there is still a need for additional research supporting it as a therapeutic intervention (Brandt & Cities, 2013).

To counter this idea of EFP as a complementary adjunct to traditional forms of treatment, Johansen et al., (2014) identify populations that do not respond to mainstream treatment approaches. They found that using equine-facilitated body and emotion-oriented psychotherapy alone in a structured manner can be beneficial. This form of therapy centers on the recognition that horses are highly sensitive and emotionally responsive creatures that can be used to teach self-awareness to participants. The therapist specifically helps the participant identify how behavior and interaction with the horse elicits responses. In sessions, they can explore together patterns of behavior and how to modify the participant's behavior to achieve desired outcomes with the horse (Johansen et al., 2014).

In a similar fashion, Carlsson et al., (2015) provided insight into the usefulness of using mentalizing and emotional labor to facilitate equine-assisted social work with adolescents in residential treatment who engage in self-harming behaviors. Since horses are described as having the ability to mirror emotions in such a way that creates genuine interaction, this creates opportunity to increase the participant's self-awareness about how their behavior directly impacts the horse and its response to them (Carlsson et al., 2015). The outcomes are seen to be beneficial to the participants and can result in a marked decrease in the negative, self-injurious behaviors.

Similarly, Move- Lac et al., (2013) conducted another study that looked at reducing the impact of self-harm. These researchersevaluatedequine-assisted psychotherapy as a creative relational approach to treating individuals who struggle with eating disorders. This approach ties in closely to the use of previously discussed Gestalt psychotherapy, since it utilized client self-determination and self-awareness to support the treatment process(Move- Lac et al., 2013).The study reviewed a case example of an individual with an eating disorder who engaged in equine-assisted psychotherapy and found her experience to be beneficial. Since the fundamental base of gestalt theory consists of three elements: experiments, relationships, and contact, it makes sense that the direct interaction with the horse contributed to the participant feeling a sense of physical support and increased awareness about his/her own body (Move- Lac et al., 2013).

Although the last few studies seem to place emphasis on physical issues, there are a number of studies that also evaluate whether equine-assisted interventions are able to reduce the impact of mental trauma as well. In their study, Yorke et al., (2008) provided information about the therapeutic value of equine-human bonding in helping individuals recovering from trauma.

Krenek (2013) examined the effects of equine-assisted activities with veterans to help improve their quality of life postcombat. Krenek noted that approximately 24% of combat veterans who served in Afghanistan and Iraq return and experience varying degrees of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Krenek, 2013). Special programming can assist the veterans in overcoming their symptoms, especially because they often will not seek treatment due to fear of the societal stigma related to receiving

mental health care. One such program called PATH International Equine Services for Heroes Program utilizes horses as part of the actual treatment interventions (Krenek, 2013). The program targets wounded military personnel with the hopes that they will experience improvements in both their physical and mental wellbeing through interacting with the horses (Krenek, 2013).

While most of the research is very specific to particular populations and circumstances, some have taken more of a general approach to identify how the use of horses in a therapy context relates to outcomes that have a positive impact. Maujean et al., (2013) conducted a systematic review pertaining to the efficacy of equine-assisted interventions that involve psychological outcomes. The authors explore how the research has been successful in proving that physical benefits result from such interventions, but their findings assert that additional research through randomized controlled trials is still needed to explore whether psychological outcomes are consistently experienced (Maujean et al., 2013).

Lastly, Parish-Plass(2013) explored in great detail animal-assisted psychotherapy and how it has evolved, offering insight into theory, practice, and implications for the future. The overview relates how, even as far back as the 1970s, roughly 20% of psychotherapists affiliated with the American Psychological Association incorporated animals into their work in some way; the trend is growing (Parish-Plass, 2013). The scope of practice has also broadened immensely to include a wide array of populations with issues related to trauma, developmental disabilities, emotional regulation problems,

attachment issues, behavioral dysfunction, and a large number of psychological disorders (Parish-Plass, 2013).

Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy

The term equine-assisted psychotherapy is generally associated with humans interacting with horses in a therapeutic manner to create opportunity for emotional healing through the use of psychotherapy techniques. According to the EAGALA, equine-assisted psychotherapy is defined as “a collaborative effort between a licensed therapist and a horse professional designed to address specific treatment issues presented by a psychotherapy client” (EAGALA, 2012). Participants experience the opportunity to learn not only about themselves, but also about others through interacting with the horses by means of interactive sessions on the ground with the equine professional. Participants also process any feelings or behaviors that surface in these collaborative sessions with the licensed mental health therapist (EAGALA, 2012).

In recent research conducted by Wang (2017), the author takes a closer look at the use of equine-assisted psychotherapy using the EAGALA model that is comprised of four key components. The first of these involves the use of a team to facilitate the sessions. The team is made up of an equine specialist and a certified mental health professional (Wang, 2017). Secondly, the therapy sessions do not involve riding the horse and are conducted solely from the ground level. The third component involves EAGALA following a professional code of ethics to support credibility and ensure wellbeing of the organization and its participants (Wang, 2017). Lastly, the fourth component that relates to the EAGALA model pertains to operating under a solution-focused approach where

direct observation of a participant's responses to maximize outcomes of the interventions is used (Wang, 2017). Although there are other approaches being used independently to implement equine-assisted psychotherapy, the EAGALA model seems to have a significant level of support and is widely implemented, not only in the United States, but also internationally (Johns et al., 2016).

Equine- Facilitated Psychotherapy

The term equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EFP) refers to a variety of beneficial activities involving horses that allow healing to take place as a result of human- horse interaction. Defined by PATH International (2016) as "a form of experiential psychotherapy that incorporates the use of horses," it differs from equine-assisted psychotherapy because it utilizes a broader variety of equine involved activities beyond groundwork. Examples of this include riding, vaulting, and driving, in addition to grooming activities (PATH International, 2016).

Like equine-assisted psychotherapy, equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EFP) requires a collaborative effort between a licensed mental health professional and a credentialed equine professional. However, this therapy can also be implemented by an individual with dual credentials as both an equine and mental health professional (PATH International, 2016). The goal of equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EFP) is quite similar to equine-assisted psychotherapy in that it seeks to assist the individual with the process of identifying feelings and behaviors and increasing overall self-awareness. In the most recent research some useful insight into the use of attachment theory to guide equine-

facilitated therapy (EFT) approaches has been shown, although additional research is needed in this area (Vincent & Farkas, 2017).

Keren Bachi (2013), who has done extensive research in the areas of equine-assisted psychotherapy as well as equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EFP), conducted a thorough life cycle analysis of the growing field of equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EFP). She found that there is a general consensus that it developed as a result of collaborative efforts rather than as the work of a single individual or organization and this partly explains why many varying forms exist today (Bachi, 2013). Currently, EAGALA and the PATH International are the two primary accredited organizations in the field (Bachi, 2013). Due to variations in their philosophies and in the way they employ their interventions, a dispute arose between the two organizations that has resulted in a long-running rift. Some individuals even choose to function independently without affiliation to either organization (Bachi, 2013). This division in the field has led to increasing difficulties in the development of standardized methods that can be evaluated for efficacy—an ongoing concern for those who seek to help the field gain credibility through empirical research (Bachi, 2013).

Equine-Facilitated Experiential Learning

Equine-facilitated experiential learning (EFEL) can be described as any activity using horses that is relevant to experiential learning (Stock & Kolb, 2016). Often used in the literature interchangeably with the term equine-facilitated learning (EFL), it is most prominently utilized in group settings with participants interacting with the horses from the ground. Four learning cycle stages are identified for use with group participants: a

concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and lastly active experimentation (Stock & Kolb, 2016). Participants work towards achieving four objectives: getting to know themselves, leveling the playing field, building trust, and being able to recognize their role as a part of a bigger system (Stock & Kolb, 2016).

One well-known name associated with this form of equine-assisted work is Linda Kohanov, founder of Epona Equestrian Services Center. She holds a dual role as both a riding instructor and a counselor with twenty years of combined experience (Maziere&Gunnlaugson, 2015). Kohanov is a specialist in equi-therapy as well as an author of four books that are internationally acclaimed: they have raised awareness about this method of equine-assisted work (Maziere&Gunnlaugson, 2015). Kohanov combines a number of techniques including spirituality, psychology, natural horsemanship, body language, and of course experiential learning(Kohanov, 2015).

The implementation of animal-assisted therapy programs in both health and mental health organizations like those mentioned above is becoming more commonplace. In their study, Mallon et al., (2006) looked at best practice guidelines for developing and implementing such therapy programs. The authors explored the topics of safety, liability, cost effectiveness and animal selection, as well as staffing and client issues. Useful implications that resulted pointed to the benefits of some standardized approaches that may maximize potential for positive outcomes (Mallon et al., 2006). These considerations also demonstrate the importance of clearly delineating and defining the various types of equine-assisted therapies to allow one to be distinguished from another, while at the same time keeping some operating mechanisms standard for consistency.

Spirituality and Equine-Facilitated Learning

Some of the current literature has begun to recognize the relevance of spirituality to equine-assisted work. Spirituality refers to what is occurring within the human spirit, the changes that take place internally within one's soul. As mentioned above, Maziere and Gunnlaugson (2015) explore how horses can be used in a therapeutic manner to teach individuals in leadership roles about themselves through comparative self-examination techniques. Sheade (2020) explores the general ability of horses to heal people through the use of counseling and psychotherapy. Puchalski (2006) examines the importance of spirituality to clinical practice. The incorporation of horses with spiritual meditation practices has also been studied, as has the human-horse interaction and its impact on not only the physiological state of the human body, but also the impact on the spiritual subconscious mind of humans (Andelora, 2017).

A recent study published in the *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* that was conducted among mothers of children with a disability specifically looked at the spiritual and holistic benefits they believe they received as a result of participation in equine-assisted therapy (Escobar, 2021). Books have also been published that illustrate the spiritual strengths of horses in a therapeutic capacity. One example, "Zen Mind, Zen Horse: The Science and Spirituality of Working with Horses" (Hamilton, 2011) focuses on the usefulness of natural horsemanship techniques to form partnerships with horses that are based on mutual respect and trust. Hamilton (2011) goes on to explain in his book that as humans mature, they have the natural tendency to redirect their focus to their spiritual growth and he asserts that this desire to attain spiritual transformation can be

accelerated by using horses as a sage or guide because they function in the present moment and can teach us to do the same. These findings have been helpful as part of meditation, yoga, and the use of mindfulness techniques when implementing integrative interventions to treat individuals with a variety of physical and mental conditions (Andelora, 2017).

In another study on the impact of equine-assisted learning (EAL) on First Nations Inuit youth, the authors explore not only the importance of spirituality to the population as a whole, but how horses fit into the role of spiritual guide for the at-risk children they interact with (Dell et al., 2011). In their study, Hunter and Sawyer (2006) also look at how spirituality plays a key role when working with Native American children to provide mental health treatment. Additional research related to animal-assisted therapy found that dogs are capable of forming strong spiritual bonds with their handlers. This notion is highly transferrable, given what we know about horses and their ability to form similar attachments (Majaraj et al., 2016).

The implementation of equine-assisted psychotherapy in a culturally responsive way with other indigenous populations for which spirituality is important has also been evaluated in a recent study conducted among Aboriginal people in Australia (Bennett et al., 2019). The study found that the use of experiential therapy involving horses to help this particular population overcome intergenerational trauma and the effects of marginalization seems to be promising in its potential to address the trauma and increase general well-being among participants (Bennett et al., 2019). These findings further

support that there may be a strong connection between spirituality and the use of equine-assisted psychotherapy.

Summary and Conclusions

Although a great deal is known about equine-assisted work, there is still much that is unknown. The literature shows that there is currently such a broad selection of implementation methods for horses in a therapeutic context that it has become difficult to evaluate what guides the practice and lends itself to evolution in the field. Through this literature review I have been able to define the various ways equine-assisted work is currently being used and to what degree this work has been compared and contrasted in the existing literature. I hope that through the sections I have written, the reader will have a clearer understanding of the differences between hippotherapy, equine-assisted therapy, equine-assisted psychotherapy, equine-facilitated learning and the implementation of each. I also hope that my overview of the most common theoretical approaches I found when reviewing the literature will help provide insight into the variances seen in treatment approaches for the different types of equine-assisted psychotherapy.

It is only through continued research efforts and attempts to synthesize the existing broad collection of literature that we can begin to identify themes and work closer to defining a unified theoretical foundation. A part of this is recognizing both the similarities and differences in the way the therapists conducting equine-assisted work think about what they do in order to further the understanding of what guides their practice approaches. In the next chapter, an overview of the research design I have

selected will be given as well as an explanation of the methods and rationale for having chosen a generic qualitative approach for my study.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

The purpose of my study was to explore how therapists who perform equine-assisted psychotherapy think about and understand what takes place between the client and the horse and to gain a better understanding of their perceptions and experiences. Some of the rationale for why I chose a generic approach was explained under the nature of the study piece in Chapter 1. However, I expand on it in more detail in this chapter. The research question that guided my study was centered on gathering knowledge about how therapists performing equine-assisted psychotherapy understand the work they do and what guides their practice.

Research Design and Rationale

In choosing a research design for this study, it was apparent, based on my research question and what I wanted to know, that a generic qualitative method would be most appropriate. It has been noted in the literature about the use of generic qualitative research approaches that information that is being collected in a psychological sense is not generally able to be measured statistically and requires a qualitative approach (Elliott & Timulak, 2021; Kahlke, 2018). However, the more focused approaches such as phenomenology, case study, ethnography, and grounded theory are not necessarily appropriate for a variety of reasons (Charmaz et al., 2019; Chun Tie et al., 2019; Levitt, 2021; Percy et al., 2015). I was able to rule out that ethnography was not appropriate for my study since it most generally is used when investigating topics in a cultural context (Kahlke, 2018; Percy et al., 2015). Although themes related to culture could certainly

have emerged, the primary focus of my study was not related to the context of culture (Kahlke, 2018; Percy et al., 2015).

Phenomenology, an approach that researchers use to understand lived experiences, allows them to capture the essence of what a person or population is going through in relation to their cognitive process (Kahlke, 2018; Percy et al., 2015). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) note that qualitative researchers are most interested in the overall meaning of things they are researching, and with phenomenology this translates into how their subjects experience events and make sense of their lived experiences. While this theory does look at feelings, attitudes, opinions, and beliefs, it is less concerned with what in particular may have triggered them (Kahlke, 2018; Percy et al., 2015). I was interested in knowing not only what guided the thought processes of the therapists, but also if there were any external factors that provided input into their clinical process.

I did consider conducting my study using grounded theory as the approach. However, as I began gathering research and writing my literature review, I began to develop an understanding that there is not one definitive theory guiding the practice of equine-assisted psychotherapy. Grounded theory requires more of an explanatory dialogue, not necessarily a descriptive one (Charmaz et al., 2017; Chun Tie et al., 2019; Percy et al., 2015). Grounded theory is commonly defined as the construction of a theory through collection and analysis of research data (Levitt, 2021; Martin & Turner, 1986). This was examined in depth by a number of prominent researchers including Charmaz (2014), Corbin and Strauss (2014), and Glaser et al. (2013), who all explored techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory. Additionally, Corley (2015)

refers to grounded theory as “engaging a phenomenon from the perspective of those living it” (Corley, 2015, p.601) and asserts that it is not a methodology that is meant to be all-encompassing. While data collected from this study may be useful for future studies using a grounded theory approach, more needs to be known about how the therapists perceive what they do in relation to the use of theory to guide their practice.

Lastly, I did evaluate whether a case study method would be beneficial.

According to Percy et al. (2015) a case study is defined as “in-depth investigations of a single case” (Percy et al., 2015, p.76) and most often involves both multiple methods and sources of data. Yin (2017) expands on this definition noting that case study is an empirical inquiry that often asks “how” or “why” and looks at real life phenomena and at the boundaries between them. Although this is seen as an exploratory approach, not enough is known about how therapists who do equine-assisted psychotherapy think about their work. I decided the use of a case study method may be more beneficial once some preliminary findings could be used to identify themes for a cross-case comparison (Yin, 2017).

To expand on what was written by Caelli et al.(2003) regarding the use of generic qualitative approaches in a standardized manner, an article was published on the use of a specific model known as the VSAIEEDC method (Kennedy, 2016). A form of cognition-based analysis developed by seminal author Dr. Roland Persson, this method uses seven steps: variation, specification, abstraction, internal verification, external verification, demonstration, and conclusion (Kennedy, 2016, pg. 1373). In addition to this, Kahlke(2014) highlighted both the benefits and risks of using generic qualitative

approaches and also went on to elaborate further on this in a subsequent publication, providing reflection and commentary on why generic qualitative approaches are a practical alternative to other forms of methodology (Kahlke, 2018). This particular approach can be considered to provide some additional structure during the data analysis phase as this method is not uncomplicated, and difficulties can arise when trying to implement generic qualitative inquiry (Caelli et al., 2003; Kennedy, 2016).

Using a generic qualitative approach, I explored through use of qualitative interviewing techniques how the therapists think about their patients, what they hope to accomplish, and how they know whether or not they are actually achieving their goals in the sessions. I looked at how they knew if these identified outcomes were occurring and how they understood the changes that do or do not occur in the equine-assisted psychotherapy sessions. They were asked if there was some particular theory they follow in thinking about their patients and the work with the horses. In addition, I asked what they learn from watching the behavior of the horses as well as how they describe the activities they assign to the clients and the horses. The resulting findings from these interviews will be used to inform both practitioners and the research community.

Role of the Researcher

While I was working independently on this study, I participated in several different capacities throughout the completion of it. First, I served as the recruiter and screener for participants prior to the actual start of the study. Once I was able to schedule interviews, the role of primary investigator and observer was then assumed. This role allowed me to collect general information related to the therapist, such as length of time performing

equine-assisted psychotherapy and number of people worked with using equine-assisted methods, in addition to asking the questions central to my study. I also collected general demographic information about the client population for each therapist (age range, gender, presenting problems, etc.) and following the actual data collection I served as data analyst to determine outcomes. Clark and Vealé (2018) support this idea by referencing how the role of the researcher is multifaceted. They explain how interpretive thinking and focus take on the utmost importance during the data collection process since the researcher essentially is the primary instrument to both gather and analyze the findings (Clark & Vealé, 2018).

I needed to remain aware of some of the challenges I could encounter when archiving the qualitative data I collected. Fink (2000) identifies seven stages in the qualitative research process that are carried out in the following order: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting. Different factors throughout the use of this process can impact the outcome: the integrity of the respondents, the actual collection and proper documentation of the data collected by the researcher, and how the researcher views his or her method and data materials (Fink, 2000).

Karagiozis (2018) also highlights how the interaction between the researcher and participants can have a significant impact on the outcome of the actual research and the knowledge derived from it. Understanding potential ethical conflicts, political impact, and cultural influences is also important and should be given consideration during the interview process (Karagiozis, 2018). This is further explained by Råheim et al. (2016),

who offers a detailed explanation of how qualitative research tends to try to find a common ground in an epistemological sense between the researcher and participant. Additionally, the authors noted that the published literature on this methodology seeks to minimize the gap between the roles of researcher and participant as well as the unequal distribution of power that exists (RÅheim et al., 2016).

Pozzebon (2018) expanded on the role of the researcher when doing non-positivistic qualitative research. She wrote several publications that provided insight into the principles that affirm such work. Traditionally, researchers who have opted to conduct qualitative research in ways that vary from mainstream approaches have struggled to prove its validity (Pozzebon, 2018). She went on to note that the actual role of the researcher is, not simply to assist in interpreting or analyzing the social reality being studied, but actually *to transform* that reality, which is more difficult to justify to the broader research community (Pozzebon, 2018).

As I completed my study I needed to remain aware of any bias I encountered that potentially could impact the outcomes and the information published related to the findings. A previous study was conducted that evaluated both dissemination and non-dissemination bias pertaining to qualitative research. In the outcomes, the authors showed an increased likelihood that researchers will synthesize the findings and evidence (Toews et al., 2016). I needed to remain mindful that the findings are *all* of equal importance: no particular outcome should be given precedence when conveying the results.

As mentioned previously, although I have worked in the mental health field before, I have never held the role of equine-assisted psychotherapist. This personal

history is still important however, since I may have a heightened awareness of mental health conditions as a result. Additionally, I have owned horses for a significant portion of my life and have found them personally to be therapeutic. In order to avoid bias during the data collection phase, I needed to be mindful not to project this personal assumption and/or opinions while interviewing the therapists. My related experiences have given me a strong bias of believing interaction with horses has therapeutic value. These experiences also have led me to pursue relationships with other individuals who have the same belief. In order to avoid any potential conflicts of interest, I also had to be careful to recruit participants with whom I did not have any personal connection, nor were involved within any professional capacity.

Methodology

The research design which was used for this study was qualitative in nature and utilized a generic qualitative method. Although I have given an overview of my rationale for choosing this method in previous sections, I will continue to expand on it here as well. Generic qualitative approaches were initially brought under strict scrutiny as an approach to research due to being poorly defined historically (Carter & Laurs, 2014). As more time and energy has been spent exploring the use of such methods, especially by doctoral students such as myself, researchers have been able to recognize that there are significant benefits to using a generic qualitative approach (Auta et al., 2017).

Carter and Laurs (2014) published a book that gives an in-depth overview of the risks and benefits of using generic approaches to qualitative research and also gives a historical overview of the growth and development of such research methods. In Chapter

3of their book they go on to explain in much greater detail that when looking at the processes associated with generic qualitative approaches, they are able to teach students the importance of still being able to accurately define what they are doing in order to demonstrate that critical evaluation has taken place despite not using a more traditional approach to qualitative research (Carter & Laurs, 2014).

Kahlke (2014, 2018) referenced this generic qualitative approach in several publications, which is also referred to as an interpretive or basic qualitative approach as being less clearly defined than the established methodologies that fall under qualitative research. As such, those approaches do not support any particular theoretical assumptions and are less theory driven, though not entirely atheoretical (Kahlke, 2014, 2018). More recently, Jahja et al., (2021) also evaluated the use of these generic approaches and indicated that qualitative research must have an understanding of theory, philosophy, and terminology which can result in conflicting perspectives. To add to this, Elliot et al. (2021) evaluated the use of a generic approach and included some analysis into the use of descriptive- interpretive qualitative research. This general approach allows for much more flexibility in terms of what the researcher wants to know, as well as to the obtaining of answers to the questions the researcher has that may not align with any particular formal methodology (Kahlke, 2014, 2018). When using the descriptive qualitative approach codes are generated using the language from the actual data itself (Renate et al., 2014).

When considering what I wanted to know and what information was required to accurately answer my research question, there were numerous approaches that could have

been utilized. According to Lichtman (2013) the purpose of qualitative research is to understand and interpret the meaning of both social phenomena and the basis of human interaction. Despite trying to apply the various qualitative frameworks to my study it became apparent that outcomes would be difficult to capture using the more traditional and compartmentalized approaches. It is for this reason primarily that a generic qualitative approach provided a greater degree of flexibility and made the most sense for my study from a research standpoint.

Participant Selection Logic

The participants I was targeting for my study were therapists who said they perform equine-assisted psychotherapy with people who have conditions that fall within the less severe range of mental health. To clarify, this range refers to those individuals who are stable and do not require acute hospitalization for psychosis, yet who still encounter challenges related to their daily functioning, emotional regulation, and ability to relate to others (Downes et al., 2013, pg. 1). I developed a flyer for recruiting purposes that had a list of the requirements participants must meet to be in my study. Criteria for participation that were outlined on the flyer included therapists who are licensed or certified in accordance with their state's laws (e.g., licensed practical counselor (LPC), licensed social worker (LSW), doctor of philosophy (PhD), medical doctor (MD), and licensed psychologist) who call their work with clients "psychotherapy", and have 3-5 years of experience performing equine-assisted psychotherapy. I indicated that I was interested in learning more about how they think about their work and also about what guides their practice.

The flyers were distributed via the social media site Facebook to recruit participants. I provided my contact information for any questions related to participation and to acknowledge interest in being part of the study. I decided on social media as a way to recruit in order to avail myself of the possible diversity of participants not just from a local area, but from across the United States. This method of recruiting seemed to offer the broadest reach within the most reasonable time constraints. I was hoping to have between 5-10 respondents willing to participate in the study. I set up interviews with each, and the interviews were to be conducted in person if possible, based on location/proximity. Other options for interviews, when face-to-face interaction was not possible, included phone contact, or the use of Skype. In order to obtain informed consent, I had participants sign a consent form I provided in advance of the interviews either in person, via email, or by mail, whatever was most convenient for the participant. By utilizing an interview consent form with participants, permission was obtained to audio record the interviews and capture verbatim responses. This allowed for the most accuracy when transcribing the data collected.

Instrumentation

For this study I developed an interview protocol combining the approaches of Seidman (2019) and Rubin and Rubin (2011) that uses a number of questions related to my research question (see appendix). Through the use of these questions, I interviewed the therapists who say they perform equine-assisted psychotherapy. In addition to this protocol, open-ended reflective questioning was used, based on the methods suggested by

Rubin and Rubin (2011) who recommend a series of layered questions aimed at gaining increased depth of response.

The importance of using advanced listening skills during the interviews cannot be emphasized enough, since it has been found that participants tend to talk most about the areas of discussion that the interviewer seems most interested in and appears to listen to (Evans et al., 2017). Since my study was exploratory rather than explanatory, the information I collected could potentially serve as a baseline for further studies and may not offer conclusive outcomes. As such the question of the sufficiency of the data collected should remain relatively open.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

After the initial recruitment efforts noted above in the participant selection logic section were completed, I completed consent forms to make the participants in my study aware of any potential risks and/or benefits related to their involvement. Once consent was obtained, I interviewed participants in depth using open-ended questioning through responsive interviewing; a form of qualitative inquiry described by Rubin and Rubin (2011). I tried to learn how they think about their work and what they think is taking place with their clients and with the horses, as well as how they measure the efficacy of their interventions. Responsive interviewing provides in-depth insight because the researchers respond to and ask additional questions based on what they hear from the participants being interviewed as opposed to relying only on predetermined questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Data Analysis Plan

The semi-structured responsive interviewing style mentioned above was beneficial to this study because it allows the researcher to have some room for digression: unexpected topics may arise that may not directly relate to the primary area of study, but may still be considered relevant to some degree (Morris, 2015). Then while he/she has specific topics he/she wants to cover related to the research questions, the study participant can feel free to elaborate, and the researcher is able to clarify what the participant says and why it is said (Morris, 2015). The participant's responses are then recorded and closely examined in a qualitative context using open coding by hand to break down the interviews into subtopics to help identify emerging themes and significances (Salmons, 2014). Additional insight into designing a coding system and using this method to analyze data was given by Vanover et al. (2021) as well as considerations for use of a qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) versus the use of hand coding. The authors highlighted the importance of considering these options in the early stages of the study to aid the data analysis process (Vanover et al., 2021).

Belotto (2018) identified in his article that qualitative approaches are well suited for the earlier stages of research when particular variables have not yet been identified. Since this was an exploratory study, minimal pre-codes were used and were limited to basic terms in therapy that can serve as a starting point to help sort and possibly code the data. Additionally, data collected from participants was cross-compared for repetition of terms that could point to themes. While Vaughn and Turner (2016) identified that a variety of software can be used to sort and organize data, for this inquiry a method

described by Damien Gorden (1992) that involves transcribing all of the interviews from the recordings and then reviewing them individually was used.

I was able to underline any repetitious words or phrases and give each word or phrase an identification number that coincided with its location in the transcript. The number used represented the line of the actual transcript and a letter such as A, B, C, D, etc. was also be assigned in cases where there was more than one word or phrase per line (Gorden, 1992). Overall, when opting to hand code instead of using software, it is beneficial to the coding process to be able to sort through the large amount of collected data one question at a time in order to organize it (Vaughn & Turner, 2016).

Once all the words or phrases were identified they could be classified into categories of relevant information and defined accordingly. This process is referred to by Saldaña (2015) as a splitter technique of coding that, as it asserts, allows the researcher to split large chunks of data into smaller categories of codes. This allowed me to compare the content of the interviews for the same topics and to summarize the results by evaluating the frequency of each type of information given in the interviews (Gorden, 1992). As previously mentioned, the data collected from these interviews will be used to provide implications and recommendations for future studies. The outcomes from the study will be made available to any of the participants who provided data and have an interest in knowing the results of the study.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Since this study was qualitative in nature it faced some limitations in terms of its level of trustworthiness. Unlike quantitative research that has various statistical measures that can be applied, qualitative research looks at four specific domains related to trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Noble & Smith, 2015). Korstjens & Moser (2018) also reiterate these four domains and assert that an integral part of ensuring quality and transparency of qualitative research is reflexivity. In addition to this, specific protocols related to characteristics of rigor are often used to increase trustworthiness in qualitative research (Amankwaa et al., 2016).

Johnson et al. (2020) also expanded on the relevance of rigor and reflexivity to the level of trustworthiness. They noted that the insight a researcher has into their own biases will impact their decision-making rationale throughout the study and contribute to the level of trustworthiness (Johnson et al., 2020). Giving special attention to the criteria associated with each when involved in not only the planning, but also in the conducting and documentation stages of the research is essential in proving to both the readers and evaluation that the research meets high quality research standards (Ponelis, 2015).

Trustworthiness in qualitative research can be defined as “the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study” (Connelly, 2016; Polit & Beck, 2014, p.435). Chang (2014) goes into great detail about the use of member checking, or sharing the data and interpretations with those from whom the data was collected from, in order to ensure accuracy. Diane (2014) also identified how effective the use of triangulation or using multiple sources of data or data

collection methods such as interviews, note taking, and observations to draw conclusions can be. It is all important to take into consideration that ultimately researchers are considered human instruments; how well-prepared they are to fulfill their role as data collectors has a tremendous impact on the outcomes of the study (Goodell et al., 2016).

Credibility

Credibility, much like internal validity, refers to the internal consistency of the study and measures how well the researcher's portrayal of his or her participants matches the actual participants' perceptions (Ponelis, 2015). The use of deep observations when interacting with the participants assisted in preserving the credibility of the data collected. Also referred to as having "confidence in the truth of the findings", credibility strengthens trustworthiness (Amankwaa, 2016, p. 10; Guba & Lincoln, 1981). As referenced by Shufutinsky (2020) establishing how inductive researchers will be able to apply "use of self" methods to increase rigor, transparency, trustworthiness, and credibility takes on significant importance.

The use of member checking to verify that both the experience of the researcher, as well as the data collected is accurate according to the participant aids in ensuring credibility (Diane, 2014). This has been considered a "gold standard" and a "crucial tactic" for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative studies (Kornbluh, 2015, p. 397; Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Respondent validation allowing the participants to review and comment on the transcripts from the interviews was utilized to investigate whether the final concepts and themes that are recorded were reported accurately (Noble & Smith,

2015). Additionally, audit trails, engagement, and methods of observation can also be used to support credibility of the study (Diane, 2014).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the study has been successful in making it viable for those reading it to apply the findings from the investigated situations to other similar situations (Ponelis, 2015). Amankwaa (2016) asserts that this also involves a researcher's ability to show that the findings are applicable in multiple contexts. It is important that *all* evidence from the study is reported so the reader has some way to determine that the findings are a direct result of the experiences and data as opposed to subjectivity and bias on the part of the researcher who conducted the study (Ponelis, 2015). A qualitative study is said to have met the criteria of transferability if individuals not connected to the study are able to relate the results of the study to their own experiences in some way (Diane, 2014).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the quality of the actual data collection and analysis (Ponelis, 2015). It must show that the research systematically studied what it intended to. Since qualitative research is not like quantitative research in its ability to generalize findings, the dependability of the study relies on the specific focus of the study and the related consistency of the data under conditions that are similar (Diane, 2014). An effort must be made to compare and contrast across all participants to identify similarities and differences, as well as to offer equal representation for all different perspectives of the participants to be included in the outcomes (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Confirmability

Also known as neutrality, confirmability refers to the acknowledgement that there is a certain level of objectivity within any given study (Noble & Smith, 2015). While it is not possible to achieve 100% objectivity, the use of confirmability to provide integrity and allow replication of the study is feasible. This is discussed when looking at the quality assessment factors of qualitative research, which, in the case of my study, involved a generic approach. The importance of confirmability can vary slightly depending on what sort of approach a study uses.

For example, while the topic of credibility seems to take on greater importance for grounded theory studies, the issue of confirmability is held in higher regard for studies of an ethnographic focus (Hannes, 2017; Toye et al., 2013). This is because transparency is essential to preserve an external locus of control. Several tactics include developing specific research protocols and being aware of any researcher bias (Ponelis, 2015). This allows for replication to occur at a later date, if need be, and reduces likelihood of researcher bias based solely on interpretations (Hannes, 2017; Toye et al., 2013).

Ethical Procedures

The American Psychological Association identified five principles for research ethics to assist researchers with their responsibility for implementing ethical strategies (APA, 2018). The topic of intellectual property is identified as one of these strategies. Although issues of authorship will not be of concern because I was the sole researcher for this dissertation, it was of utmost importance that I properly cited all work that has contributed to the development of my study.

The second principle relates to having multiple conflicting roles as a researcher (APA, 2018). As previously mentioned, I have identified the areas of potential bias I have related to my experiences as a horse owner and a former mental health therapist. However, the level of conflict would have drastically increased if I were currently working as an equine-assisted psychotherapist. The third principle identified by the American Psychological Association is the importance of following the rules surrounding informed consent (APA, 2018). The informed consent must make the participant aware of any potential benefits or risks of participation, the purpose of the research, procedures used for the research and anticipated duration, limitations that may impact their confidentiality, incentives offered in exchange for participation (if any), who the participant can contact if they have any questions, and lastly their right to withdraw from the study (APA, 2018).

The privacy and confidentiality of the study participants was of utmost importance. This is recognized as the fourth principle identified by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2018). This study was required to undergo stringent reviews by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure full compliance with their standards. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is responsible for ensuring all research involving human subjects is conducted in accordance with all institutional, federal, and ethical guidelines (Walden University, 2017).

Since the use of in-person, face-to-face consent was impeded by distance related logistics, the concept of teleconsent, completing/sending a consent form electronically, was explored. While this is a relatively new concept in relation to research participation,

this approach has been used with great success in relation to clinical telehealth services (Lopez et al., 2018). It eliminates many barriers related to study participation and both increases access and protects the anonymity of the participants (Lopez et al., 2018).

The data collected was de-identified as much as possible to ensure privacy of the participants: identification numbers were assigned for data tracking purposes.

Additionally, encryption of the electronic data and proper destruction of the data through deletion of files following completion of the study were also used to protect the participant's privacy and confidentiality throughout the entire study process.

Lastly, the fifth principle of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2018) identified pertains to the use of the ethics-related resources available to researchers. This includes reviewing the code of ethics APA developed and considering other resources such as The Belmont Report when developing the ethical framework to implement the study (APA, 2018). Overall, maintaining a high level of awareness about potential ethical dilemmas that could arise throughout the course of the study was of utmost importance.

Summary

This chapter gave an overview of the chosen research design and rationale for using a generic qualitative approach as opposed to a more traditional method of qualitative inquiry. The decision to utilize an exploratory method was based on the lack of research on how therapists who perform equine-assisted psychotherapy think about what they do and what guides their practice. Any issues related to trustworthiness and ethical procedures were given careful consideration and techniques for addressing each were

considered. Chapter 4 will consist of a presentation of the data as well as discussion surrounding research findings and future implications.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose and research question for this exploratory, generic qualitative study was to gather insight into how therapists who say they are performing equine-assisted psychotherapy understand what is taking place between the client and the horse. The research question was developed to identify the individual experiences and perception of the study participants. An interview protocol specifically designed with the research question in mind was used with the participants.

The interview questions I developed were open ended and consisted of seven guiding questions to encourage open dialogue and maximize the collection of qualitative data. An eighth and final closing question was also included in this interview protocol. This was done in an attempt to capture the broadest range of responses from the study participants. In some cases during the interviews, additional informal questioning in addition to the protocol questions took place for clarification purposes. More details on the research methodology, the generic qualitative design which was chosen to conduct the study, participant selection, and the ethical procedures used in the collection of the data were included in Chapter 3. In this chapter I revisit the research question, the setting, demographics of participants, data collection and analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and present the detailed results and findings of the study.

Setting

The setting of the study was my private office at my personal residence and interviews were conducted via telephone due in part to the distance of the participants

and concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic. No letters of cooperation were needed since no external organizations were involved in conducting my study, and there were no conflicts of interest that impacted the study or participants. Approval to conduct the study was granted by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the associated reference number assigned was 10-15-19-0323973.

Participation in my study was entirely voluntary and no recruitment efforts were made prior to formal approval from the IRB. In regards to personal and organizational conditions, the only significant potential impact on the study was the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred during the data collection phase of my study. Most, if not all of the participants were impacted on some level, either personally or professionally or both, by the pandemic. Some expressed that their organizations operations had been temporarily suspended or were operating with a limited number of staff resulting in hardship and changes to their normal procedures and schedules.

Demographics

The five study participants consisted of four females and one male. Each of the participants was assigned an identification number in the order I conducted their interviews ranging from #001 to #005 in order to preserve anonymity and to allow for data tracking purposes. While all of the participants were from the United States of America, as required by the study criteria, all were from different states. These states included Utah, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, and Hawaii.

All five study participants were actively working with programs that offered equine-assisted psychotherapy with mental health populations and while the study

requirements specified a minimum of 3 years of experience, all five participants who consented to participation exceeded this criterion. Additionally, all five participants were licensed or certified in accordance with their individual state laws to practice psychotherapy. The actual credentials for the five participants involved in the study consisted of an LCSW/DCSW, a state licensed SUDC (Substance Use Disorder Counselor), an MSW/LSW, an LICSW, and an LPC-MHSP. I also collected basic demographic information about the client population for each therapist (gender, location, credentials, etc.). The chart below provides a compilation of this demographic information.

Table 1

Demographics of Study Participants

Participant ID	Gender	Location	Credentials
#001	Female	Pennsylvania	MSW/LSW
#002	Female	Hawaii	LCSW/DCSW
#003	Female	Massachusetts	LICSW
#004	Female	Tennessee	LPC-MHSP
#005	Male	Utah	State Licensed SUDC

Data Collection

Data for the study was collected using a generic qualitative approach and qualitative interviewing techniques to determine how the therapists think about their patients, what they hope to accomplish, and how they know whether or not they are

actually achieving their goals in the sessions. I used a semistructured interview protocol (refer to Appendix A) that consisted of seven guiding questions and an eighth closing question. Some questions were asked out of order in the interviews in response to attempts made by the participants to lead the discussion. Open-ended reflective questioning and a responsive interviewing style were utilized to encourage maximum dialogue and collection of data from the participants. Interviews were anticipated to last approximately 1 hour and only one slightly exceeded that time frame by 9 minutes and 49 seconds.

Five participants gave informed consent to participate in the interview process and all five interviews took place via phone during the time frame from January to July in 2020. Originally, it was considered a potential option to be able to conduct studies in person whenever possible; however due to the locations and distance of each participant this was not feasible as all participants were over 2 hours away from me. I currently reside in Pennsylvania, and four of the five participants resided in Utah, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and Hawaii. The remaining participant, although residing within the state of Pennsylvania, was located at the opposite end of the state near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania which is almost 6 hours away from where I reside. In this case, a phone interview was the most logical option and provided the most consistency in my data collection process. Interviews were conducted from my private home office in Cranesville, Pennsylvania to preserve confidentiality of the participants.

I began each interview by asking if there were any questions about the informed consent or the study itself and by collecting the general demographic information about the client population for each therapist (age range, gender, presenting problems, etc). The

interviews were then recorded using a digital recorder to allow transcription following completion. Transcripts of the interviews were created using Microsoft Word and responses and dialogue recorded verbatim. Additionally, notes were taken during the interview process to allow me to cross reference the information collected in case clarification with participants was necessary.

While participants had the right to discontinue the interview at any time, all five participated in entirety. No unusual circumstances occurred that disrupted the data collection process during the actual interviews. It did take a longer than anticipated time frame to obtain the required number of participants and conduct the interviews due in part to challenges related to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. It was because of this that both the recruitment and data collection phases were run concurrently. Two participants who had initially reviewed the informed consent and agreed to participate earlier on in my data collection phase ended up postponing the actual interviews due to dealing with the crisis at hand. A sixth potential participant ultimately withdrew citing challenges related to the impact of the pandemic and being overwhelmed.

Data Analysis

The data that was collected during the interviews using a responsive interviewing style allowed me to respond to the participants and ask additional questions based on what they shared with me in addition to what they shared in response to my predetermined questions on the interview protocol. While this provided the opportunity for more information to be collected, it did make the data analysis slightly more

challenging as I could not simply code according to the specific questions and the corresponding responses. The data that was collected was examined in a qualitative context by using open coding by hand to break down the interviews into subtopics and this helped identify any emerging themes. It is important to note that minimal pre-codes were used during this process other than specific keywords related to basic terms in therapy that could serve as a starting point. These included the following terms associated with the guiding questions: “equine-assisted psychotherapy”, “theory”, and “treatment modality”.

I was able to go through each individual interview transcript and underline key words and phrases and assign them an identification number (or if there were multiple key words in the same line of the transcript, both a number and a letter were assigned) for later comparison. Once the frequency of keywords was documented for each of the individual interviews categories and themes were able to be identified using the splitter technique identified in Chapter 3, I was able to look at the information collectively for all five of the interviews. This technique allowed me to split the larger sections of data into smaller categories of codes that could be compared across interviews and ultimately summarized.

In order to move inductively from these smaller coded units to a broader, much larger representation that would allow for a thematic analysis, I then reviewed the transcripts again and used active listening by focusing completely on the participant and their feedback to review the recorded interviews while applying the initial codes I had identified. I then used descriptive labeling to capture larger themes and identify

categories represented by the data. It is important to note that when new codes were added during this second review, the descriptions of the initial codes were sometimes changed to create new codes to avoid having different codes for the same responses found in the different parts of the interviews.

A number of specific codes, categories, and related terms emerged from the data that contributed to identifying themes. As expected the term “Equine-Assisted” was frequently used as well as “therapy”, “psychotherapy”, “treatment”, “practice”, “model”, “modality” and “theory” and these served as codes during data analysis. Additional categories and related terms that reoccurred in the interviews according to my coding efforts included “behavior”, “approach”, “attachment”, “framework”, “outcomes”, “mindful”, “safety”, “language”, “field”, “regulation”, “awareness”, “experiential”, “organic”, “environment”, “intervention”, “self-awareness”, “self-esteem”, “boundaries”, “spiritual”, “emotional”, “intuitive”, “therapeutic”, “communication”, and “trauma”.

The majority of these codes, categories, and related terms were present in multiple interviews, and in many cases mentioned multiple times in individual interviews giving them significance to the coding process. In relation to how the level of importance was determined and the qualities of discrepant cases were accounted for, a flat coding frame was used. As noted by Turner (2021), some researchers have a preference for flat coding, essentially avoiding pre codes and sub codes that may give more importance to certain terms. Additionally, flat coding allows the researcher to see all the codes and avoids them grouping codes into themes before the coding process has been completed (Turner, 2021). Although a hierarchical one was considered, because of the broad range of data

across the five interviews, I did not want to place more importance on certain terms than others and I also wanted to remain flexible in my ability to analyze the data moving forward.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

As previously mentioned in chapter 3, interviews were audio recorded with permission from the participants to allow for accurate transcription and review. I was able to listen to these recordings and capture the responses verbatim. Barrett et al. (2018) identified three core approaches to the data collection process: interviews, focus groups, and observations that allow the researcher to gain significant insight and preserve the quality of the data being collected. Not only did I utilize interviews, but also made use of deep observations during the interviewing process to help accurately capture responses from the participants and helped preserve the internal consistency. Additionally, member checking when clarification was needed aided me in verifying the perception of the participants and ensured validation of the respondents. In some cases additional information was also provided by participants voluntarily via email to expand on the information they provided during the interview process (i.e.: website information, program information, etc.) that also provided an additional point of reference to ensure I understood the information they shared with me accurately.

Transferability

While I as the researcher cannot necessarily prove the findings of this study will be applicable in all cases, I am able to assert with considerable confidence that the results

can be easily generalized by those not directly connected to the study. The findings are based on a small sample, however the five participants in my study offered a diverse range of insight and feedback through their interview responses that supports external validity and all of these findings can be applicable in some context to larger populations of equine-assisted psychotherapists. This will allow the findings of the study to be applied with larger populations, such as in replicated studies with the inference that the results and findings would be either the same or quite similar.

Dependability

The dependability of my study aimed to ensure that my study findings were consistent with the raw data that was obtained throughout the interview process. While I did not conduct an external audit to achieve this, I did pay careful attention to the data as I collected it, reviewed it, and analyzed it to form my interpretations and conclusions to ensure accuracy in my final reporting. Carcary (2020) identified that qualitative research by design is more complex and that the research design has the ability to change and emerges throughout the data collection and analysis process. Based on this she notes that strategies such as an audit trail need to be incorporated into the research process early on, maintained, and followed through to benefit the reader and allow them to justify the actions taken by the researcher and to provide transparency (Carcary, 2020).

I was extremely careful in my data analysis stage to review each interview and related transcript individually to avoid confusing the content of each interview and to make sure that the coding and themes that resulted were easily traced back to the interview from which they were sourced. This was accomplished using a detailed

organization and recording process to provide an audit trail. I used color coded folders and matching labels to help with this process and kept notes and observations separate and labeled according to the assigned participant ID number.

Confirmability

As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, some level of personal awareness had to be maintained throughout my interviews and during the data collection and analysis process given my personal history of owning horses and working in the mental health field previously. Although I have never worked in the capacity of an equine-assisted therapist, some of my close associations to key areas related to my study could contribute to a level of bias had I not remained cognizant of these connections and recognizing the impact they had on my interpretation of the data. I was able to remain subjective and communicate the findings based on the content of the interviews and this supported the confirmability and overall trustworthiness of the study.

Results

This results section is organized by three potential themes that emerged which relate to the research question and could potentially be used to inform future research studies. I have incorporated supporting data for how I identified each of these themes by including participant statements from the interview transcripts in each section. My interview protocol consisted of eight questions, seven of which were guiding questions and the eighth which was the closing question. As previously mentioned, the five participants were assigned an identification number in the order I conducted their interviews ranging from #001 to #005 in order to preserve anonymity and to allow for

data tracking purposes. It is important to note that although I made every effort to ask the questions in sequence during the interviews, there were times the participants responses also guided us into responding to the other questions included in the protocol (see appendix A). The three identified themes from the data include: sense of belonging, empowerment, and client function and have been presented below in that order with any subthemes that were identified associated with each.

Themes

Theme 1: Sense of Belonging

The first major theme that emerged from the data was clients developing a sense of belonging or connectedness with the program, horses, and staff. This seemed to be important in regards to the outcomes of the therapy sessions, and the overall perception of the efficacy of the equine-assisted psychotherapy work. A number of categories and related terms led to the identification of this particular theme. The terms “therapy” and “psychotherapy” were noted in the dialogue provided by all five participants and related to having a therapeutic, clinical alliance of one or more parties, generally with a specific outcome in mind. The term “equine-assisted” was also used and referred to the involvement of a horse in the therapeutic dynamic. Several subthemes also emerged including attachment, safety, and inclusivity which were supported by the interview responses provided by the study participants.

Attachment

The terms “attachment”, “connection”, “bond”, were referenced by three of the participants during the interview process and seemed to support having a sense of

belonging as being a central theme in the work they do. The response of participant #003 to the question that referenced the use of theorists and theories specifically related to attachment theory and the work of John Bowlby and stated “I would definitely say attachment theory”. She went on to name additional theory/ theorists that influence her work stating “Internal family systems because that is kind of the trauma work, and the research that has come out of the trauma center with Bessel vander Kolk- that is sort of the body keeps the score, and Peter Levine’s work also has been a huge part- I would definitely say that has influenced me- that theoretical kind of cake that I have digested and it is a big part of the sort of body awareness when working with horses”.

This same participant later made reference to the concept of biophilia and work by E.O. Wilson, an American biologist and entomologist. She noted the original concept of biophilia was later explored more by psychologist Erich Fromm and centers around the idea that “humans possess an innate tendency to seek connection with nature and other forms of life”. Lastly, she noted the work of psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott in developmental psychology has had an impact on the work she does as it allows her to focus on the connections that occur between humans and horses.

Some of the additional findings from the data related to this particular theme and the subtheme of attachment also involved the term and related category of “theory”. For example, when I began exploring the responses to the fifth question in my interview protocol which focused more on the theoretical influence of the work performed by the therapists, participant #001 provided a theoretical reference in line with this identified major theme of having a sense of belonging. The work of Dr. Daniel Hughes and the

dyadic developmental therapy (DDT) was noted in her responses. More meaning behind how this relates to the theme of having a sense of belonging will be presented when we discuss the implication of the findings in Chapter 5, however, participant #001 shared through her responses how this particular theory influences the work she does with their population of focus that experiences a variety of challenges related to trauma, emotional regulation, and attachment related disorders.

This same major theme resurfaced again when participant #003 was asked the eighth and final question in the protocol. She did not have anything additional to say initially, but after a brief moment of thought responded in detail going back to the topic of biophilia and the human tendency to seek connection with nature and other forms of life. She shared candidly noting that there is science and data related to the efficacy of the work that is done within the concept of biophilia, and that there are other people to whom they have been talking who do this work and who believe in the related hypothesis and use it to inform their work. She went on to say “there has been some really interesting discussions” and that the Institute for Human-Animal Connection has a connection to the larger organization the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organizations (IHAIIO).

Participant #003 also referenced Nina Ekholm Fry who is the Director of Equine Programs and is affiliated with the Institute of Human-Animal Connection at the University of Denver as being a noteworthy person to contact for additional information. She also spoke on the topic of connection between people and horses on a physical level and noted “there is a lot of work within the veterinary world and they are really looking

at equine physiology and wellness and making sure that people who are doing this work have a solid foundation in that as well". She shared that the head of the University of Pennsylvania veterinary school spoke at a conference they attended and that the research is showing when humans and canines cohabitate they are actually starting to share the same microbiomes- gut microbiomes. She ended with "we are both better off for having these shared microbiomes, so my question would then be do we have the same thing with horses"? Overall, attachment and development of a bond in the therapeutic relationship seems to be an area of interest in relation to the primary research question and how the therapists understand what is taking place in the therapy sessions they facilitate.

Safety

"Safety" was also a term that was brought up by several of the study participants as being important to the work they do. Instilling a sense of safety and maintaining a safe environment helped individuals with being able to form those necessary therapeutic connections with both the therapists and the horses and achieve desired outcomes. Working with large animals like horses tends to create sense of vulnerability among humans due to the difference in size and strength and this creates a dynamic which fosters trust between the therapist who has experience working with the horses and the client who relies on them to maintain a level of safety in the therapeutic sessions.

To illustrate this point further, the first question in the interview protocol closely aligned with the research question I developed for the study that inquires how the therapists understand what is taking place between the client and the horse. When answered by the second participant it resulted in a dialogue about safety as the priority,

and that the individuals receiving the therapy, as well as everyone involved in working with the horses, remain safe during the process which requires a certain degree of trust and connectedness. In addition to this, that same participant also highlighted the major theme of having a sense of belonging when she explained that “the underlying purpose is to increase children and adult’s sense of confidence, their sense of being special” citing that self-esteem and a sense of belonging to a collective is important when measuring outcomes of what they do. This subtheme of safety seems to overlap with the other subthemes including developing a sense of attachment and feeling a sense of belonging based on the trust that is fostered in the therapeutic sessions using safety as a foundation for the work they do.

Inclusivity

Additional findings related to this major theme of having a sense of belonging included the term “inclusivity”. Participant #002 did not elaborate on a particular theorist in response to question five, rather spoke in alignment with this first theme about the importance of inclusivity by “letting them feel welcome and that they can just be themselves, imperfect beings that we all are”. She cited the relevance of this stating “I believe- and what I wanted was less focused on skill and more focused on emotional belonging”. She noted how they take a “client-centered” approach at their program and strive to see their clients “invest their energy so that they are a part of the whole deal- a cog in the wheel- and they feel that way- like they are important and they matter”.

Later, the eighth and final question of the interview protocol addressed if there was anything else the participants wanted to share with me about equine-assisted

psychotherapy. This was presented as an open-ended question to allow the participants some freedom to include any additional pertinent information that otherwise might have been excluded by my more targeted questions in the protocol. Keeping with this theme of a sense of belonging, the participant #002 gave the following response to this particular question in the protocol noting “I would say that it works, whether we have 100 articles scientific research projects to prove that or not- my experience from the get go is that it works and because it’s motivational, it is not a chore for the rider- it’s fun”. She added to this original statement noting:

The side effect of all that fun is they have more serotonin in their brain they feel better, they have a better outlook on life, less depressed, and the same way that they learn how to partner up with horses, they then transfer that to their human relationships and they learn to partner up with human beings. They learn that what’s best for all is best for them- that everybody rides together so all the horses are taken good care of then everyone wins- the horses win, the kids win, the riders win, I win.

The discussion then led to the notion that humans crave connection and they begin to understand the importance of the relationships between everything and that they are part of a larger whole. Making the process fun, from the perspective of the therapist lends to the assumption that the individuals will be more receptive to therapeutic interventions and more likely to be open to developing a therapeutic alliance and becoming part of the process.

As the data showed, having a sense of belonging seems to be a central theme that relates closely to the initial research question of how the therapist understands what is taking place between the client and the horse. The importance of maintaining a sense of safety and inclusivity as well as the use of theory to help assess how to build those therapeutic connections between the therapist, horses, and the people participating in the therapy to maximize therapeutic outcomes will be more closely examined in Chapter 5 when exploring the implications of these findings.

Theme 2: Empowerment

A second major theme that emerged from the data was client empowerment. This encompassed several subthemes as well including having a sense of accomplishment, more confidence/ improved self-esteem, and a general increase in satisfaction and personal wellbeing. Revisiting the research question posed by this study which tries to identify how therapists who say they are doing equine-assisted psychotherapy understand what is taking place between the client and the horse, it makes it possible to see how a client's response to the therapy is an important area for the therapist to remain aware of during the therapeutic process. Three subthemes emerged related to this major theme of empowerment: having a sense of accomplishment, seeing an improvement in confidence and self-esteem, and having an increase in personal satisfaction and general wellbeing.

Sense of Accomplishment

Through the participant responses there seemed to be a common perception that success was largely dependent on the client experiencing a sense of accomplishment and achievement from the interaction that took place with the horses and staff in the equine-

psychotherapy sessions. Seeing an increase in a client's personal satisfaction, confidence level, and general wellbeing were identified as important for the therapists to know the clients were meeting identified goals. Participant #005 responded to the initial question of the protocol by elaborating on how he strives to help their clients "to recognize their own ability to fix their own issues" and to "learn how to ask for help when in need". He spoke about how the shame and guilt encountered by many of those they serve with mental health issues is what "keeps them from asking for help". He went on to note "that is what keeps them sick as well".

When responding to the question in the protocol which read "How do you tend to understand the nature of your client's difficulties?" participant #001 went into great detail about the impact of trauma and compounded stress on the population she serves and how she tries to help them overcome it through the use of education and empowerment. She elaborated on trying to understand the source of the trauma, whether it is developmental, environmental, or systemic in nature in order to be more effective in treating the compounded issues that can affect the clients and in some cases their families as well. This participant referred to viewing the population she works with through a "trauma lens" to be able to understand the nature of their difficulties.

Lastly, participant #005 responded to the same question that he has a connection with the population of focus based on his personal experience. He shared that he has personal experience with both substance abuse and being in recovery, as well as with mental health- particularly dealing with depression and anxiety. He noted that this allows him to understand what the clients he serves are experiencing first hand and can aid them

with a sense of empowerment. Overall, it seems that helping clients overcome their barriers and instilling a sense of accomplishment seems to be central idea that relates to the research question which asks how the therapists understand what is taking place in the work they do with the clients and the horses.

Confidence/ Self-esteem

The second subtheme that was identified was seeing an improvement in the client's confidence and self-esteem. How this was tracked and measured seemed to vary between the study participants, some through observation while others used more formal methods such as treatment planning and goal setting. For example, participant #002 focused more on the treatment planning aspect as a method of goal setting and empowerment in her response to the questions. She shared how while treatment plans are utilized, there is plenty of room for flexibility and individualizing based on the needs of the clients they serve, and how the clients are responding to the therapy. She went on to explain the importance of this in a group setting since each client may be experiencing different levels of progress in relation to their individual goals. Lastly, she noted that while the prescribed goals are good, the main goal is "that they learned something today that made them walk away feeling good about themselves" which aligns with the theme of empowerment and subtheme of improving confidence and self-esteem.

In keeping with the major theme of empowerment and the related subtheme of improving confidence and self-esteem, the response offered to the seventh question in the protocol by participant #002 focused on a few key questions that she shared with me: "Did they have a good time? Did they feel good about what they did and do they keep

coming back? Week after week, after week? Camp after camp? Like that- that is important". She went on to add "I look for, you know, if I am interested or they are physically able to move forward in their riding skills and of course I am always looking for a little bit more in time" when referring to the individual progress she looks for with the clients she serves. Lastly, she also referenced the ability for the skills clients learn in their equine-assisted psychotherapy sessions to be transferable to other areas of their life that continue to foster a sense of empowerment noting:

Sure, I am happy to take kids and produce independent riding- it does wonders for their self esteem, but it is not my goal- their goal is they should have a good time and they should feel accomplished and as a side effect of increasing their body tone and their balance and their stability when they are walking- at least that they can do other things- It opens their world in a whole other way.

In relation to this major theme of client empowerment from the data, participant #005 shared in the response to question seven in the protocol how it tends to be reflected in how much the clients take personally in the sessions with the horses and also how willing they are to ask for help. He explained how at the first session the clients are expected to pick their horse and when this process unfolds often times the horses may not want to be caught and some clients take this personally and jump to the conclusion that the horse doesn't like them when the truth of the matter is they are simply avoiding work.

Increasing confidence and self-esteem also relates closely to an individual's ability to set boundaries in personal relationships. An example provided by participant #005 that keeps with the major identified theme of empowerment and related

subthemes involves the use of boundaries and how well clients negotiate them. The ability to set boundaries, enforce them, and remain assertive increases self- confidence and provides a sense of accomplishment for the clients. He went on to share:

I do a little physical exercise where the client has to back the horse up 10 feet without moving their feet-so they have to stand in a hula hoop and get their horse to back up- my lead ropes are all 12-15 feet long so they have to get that horse to back up 15 feet basically, and none of the clients know how to back up my horses unless they have been in a group before with me, and until somebody asks me how to back them up I won't tell them- and then even after I have given instructions how there will be close to 50% that won't be able to do it because they are not assertive enough.

He went on to identify that this highlights the challenges related to self esteem and lack of boundaries which then become a clinical focus of the future sessions. Participant #005 ended his response to this question noting that "I have kind of a mantra that you never end on failure and I never let a person go out of this arena without them feeling some kind of accomplishment". In general, this shows the importance of making sure the client's have a positive and empowering experience as being one area the therapists pay close attention to in the work they do.

Increase in Personal Satisfaction/ General Wellbeing

The third subtheme which emerged from the data was the therapist being able to see the client experiencing an increase in personal satisfaction and general wellbeing as a result of their participation in therapy. This closely overlaps with both the major theme of

empowerment and the other identified subthemes. The final question, which was also referred to as the closing question in my interview protocol reads “Is there anything else you would like to share with me about equine-assisted psychotherapy?” One participant response to this question related to the major theme of client empowerment. Participant #001 responded noting “I think that there is a lot to be said for how impactful this approach to treatment is” and gave a detailed explanation of how it is raising awareness to the importance of alternative treatment approaches. She went on to add “I think that-again, being experiential, and solution oriented it very much empowers clients that so much is done-the deep therapeutic and intensive therapeutic work... to become more evidence based-this is a young kind of model they’re working actively to be you know-rooted in research”.

This second major theme which focuses on clients developing a sense of empowerment also relates closely to the primary research question asking how the therapists understand what is taking place between the client and the horse. Areas such as setting boundaries, overcoming barriers, and developing a sense of accomplishment seemed to be encompassed in this theme and subtheme of seeing an increase in personal satisfaction and wellbeing according to the participant responses and data that was collected. More explanation of what defines empowerment in this context and implications of how it can be applied to the clinical work done by the therapists using the horses will be provided in Chapter 5 when exploring implications of these findings.

Theme 3: Client Function

A third major theme that emerged from the results of the interviews focused on an improvement in the clients' overall ability to function. This was an extremely broad category with many variables between clients according to what was shared in the participant responses, thus no subthemes were identified. This major theme of improving client function, however, helps to answer the research question posed by the study that asks how therapists who say they are doing equine-assisted psychotherapy understand what is taking place between the client and the horse. Although all of the five participants highlighted different ways they assess this when observing the client and the horse, each participant also seemed to align with the idea that the clients who participate in the equine-psychotherapy tend to show improvement in a number of areas related to their general functioning including emotional regulation, interpersonal skills, self-esteem, and even physical functioning resulting in a better quality of life for the clients and their families.

Participant#001 expressed during the response she gave to the initial question in the protocol that the overarching goals of the work she does is to reduce the stress level of the participants and to help them to have a better quality of life overall.

Participant#003 responded to the very same question by noting the "common thread" for the clients served is being able to develop "internal regulation" and outcomes are measured to some degree by their ability to both identify and develop the skills to be able manage their internal state. The response given by participant #004 to this same question identified that he the equine work is not used as a standalone therapy when doing the

individual work, but becomes useful when a client is encountering triggers and reaches a “fight, flight, or freeze” moment and “shuts down” meaning they are not responding to traditional therapy approaches.

Continuing with this theme of improving client function, participant #002 responded to the second question in the protocol by crediting her skills gained from being a social worker and being “alert” and “hyper-vigilant” in order to remain aware of what is going on at all times as allowing her to understand the clients she serves better. She went on to say “for me it is about being super mindful and conscious about a rider’s - not just physical limitations, but their emotional connection to their physical limitations”. Additionally, she went on to note that in the program she works in they make every effort to turn weakness into strengths stating “It might be a teachable moment when they are having a hard time”.

Participant #003 responded to the second question of the protocol in a two part explanation, the first of which referenced the information gathering that takes place at intake that combines the necessity of paperwork, while also affording the opportunity “to get a read on the client” and familiarize themselves with the needs involved as well as strengths the client possesses. The second part of her response focused on identifying points of resistance with the clients she serves and being able to use the insight she gains from the work with the horses to reduce or eliminate the client’s resistance so therapy can take place. In closing for this question, this participant noted when referring to the work she does using the horses “it is less threatening and I get much less resistance working at the barn than in any other clinical setting”.

The response to the second question in the protocol by participant #004 was more clinical in nature and referenced the use of a Cognitive Behavioral lens and understanding basic brain function and how it affects the client's ability to perform basic tasks with the horses to establish trust in order to increase the client's functioning. She also mentioned their use of the EAGALA model to work on the fundamentals of self-regulation citing the majority of the identified population they work with are in "a constant state of fight, flight, or freeze" and lack self-regulatory skills. Posing questions on a treatment plan such as "what is my body telling me?" and "how do I use my words to get my needs met?" and "how do I accept it- how do I make choices and compromises?" also support this process according to participant #004.

In response to the third question in the protocol which states: "What do you consider when deciding on a particular form of therapy for a client?", participant #001 delved into how in her particular program she uses a combined approach to integrate the equine-assisted psychotherapy with dyadic developmental therapy (DDT) to support client function. She also mentioned that they incorporate specialized training to have an even greater impact. The training mentioned, known as neurofeedback, is designed to assist with stabilization of the clients they serve within the program.

In keeping with this major theme of improving client function, participant #003 responded to this same question noting that the way she decides on therapy approaches for a client hinges on a format she has personally created over the years based on all of the collective knowledge she has gained from trainings and experiences. She gave a much more detailed explanation of this noting: "I have basically based it on all of the various

trainings I've done and you know- the work I have read from people who do the work- who I respect and think are doing the work in an ethical and appropriate way, so it's quite- I will say quite organic, its fluid and really depends on the needs of the client". She also elaborated on the usefulness of work done by Yalom Irving, a therapist who has significantly influenced their group work. In addition to this, she mentioned her interest in getting certified in IFS- internal family systems (Schwartz, 1995) and eventually incorporating those techniques into the work she does with the horses.

Also related to the theme of improving client function, participant #004 referenced her connection to the EAGALA model as well as the use of trust-based relational interventions in her current work as far as a consistent format of working with clients. She explained that this approach primarily centers on ground work, meaning the clients interact with the horses at ground level through handling them, but do not get on or ride the horse. Although EAGALA is what is currently being used in her program, this same participant expressed an interest in learning more about PATH as an approach involving riding if she were to "step out of direct care". Additionally she noted "I think that if you are going to do equine therapy across the board you are not going to find a consistent treatment model".

Pertaining more to the evaluation of whether a client's functioning is improving, participant #005 spoke about the importance of doing assessments with his population of focus to allow him to assess the individual needs of each of the clients he serves. He noted that this is often accomplished in a "process group" format where he will spend approximately 10 minutes talking with each client to find out "what is going on in their

life and what their needs are”. He shared that this typically takes place in a group of 8 clients but there have been as many as 15 at a time which can make it more challenging to accomplish. These groups range approximately 2 ½ to 3 hours in duration and the sessions generally take place weekly, although the length of involvement can vary greatly.

The following collection of responses from the fourth question of the protocol which asked “Are there certain kinds of behavior (concerns, problems) that you think you tend to pay more attention to?” seemed to align with the emerging theme of improving the clients overall ability to function. Participant #001 shared about how many of the individuals she serves in her program’s population of focus present with attachment disorganization issues and how trauma is also a primary concern. She went on to share other key areas of focus being “attachments, relational aspects, emotional regulation, and expression” versus cognitive behavioral approaches due to looking at the “behavior as a symptom of a much deeper rooted issue”. In addition to this she shared that the equine-assisted psychotherapy program she works with “stems a lot from experiential and solution oriented approaches to treatment”. She noted that it is “really believing that your client has solutions within them, and what works for one person or what works for you or works for I is going to be different from each and every person”.

Participant #002 evaluated client function from a different perspective and answered the fourth question by detailing some of the client challenges she faces and how they overcome them, particularly with high need children such as those diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) that attend their program and require

constant monitoring by the staff to keep them safe during the therapeutic process. According to what she shared, some clients can be more “impulsive” and “labor intensive”, and require creative approaches such as having them do range gym and ride backwards in the saddle. She went on to share that:

I don't really personally understand why it works, and I tell folks all the time I don't know how electricity works either, I just know how to turn on the switch and that is how I feel it is with the program- we need more science behind it so that the insurance companies will validate our experience that children and adults get from being involved with horses.

Participant #003 also provided a different perspective on how they assess a client's ability to function, and responded to the fourth question in a different fashion, highlighting that she approaches the process by “very carefully focusing on how regulated or dis-regulated is this client in that moment” and in addition to the regulation piece she also pays attention to the attachment taking place stating “what is the beginning of our relationship looking like- our therapeutic- the therapeutic relationship”. She went on to describe in more detail how trauma has also become an area of focus but that she still looks at the regulation and attachment issues noting “I have gotten into more of the trauma based work, but that the regulation- the issue around internal regulation- it's just- it was there like this common thread- that is very much what I focus on” and “it all does have that common theme of- you know- self-awareness”. Additionally, she noted that therapists working in their program are PATH certified and working in a PATH

member center although it is not currently PATH accredited so this influences their approach to the clients they serve.

The response to the same question by the participant #004 traces back to a clinical approach. She identified the use of a cognitive behavioral lens as the basis for viewing the ability to function and behavior of those she works with. She referenced how her prior experiences working with juvenile offenders as well as subsequent work with victims in the capacity of forensic interviewing have influenced her current work. She noted “as soon as I can make that connection I have lowered their stress level and so now they are not thinking fight, flight, or freeze anymore- so anything I teach them in that moment is going to be able to stay because it is registered up in the prefrontal cortex”.

Participant #004 also referenced the EAGALA model as it relates to the clients ability to function and how it is important to help clients understand the relationship between their physiological and emotional/mental state and the regulation that goes along with it. Observing the behavior of the client, both their physical and emotional state also influences the way treatment plans are developed also plays a key role. She went on to note “If I had a template for a treatment plan it is going to be what is my body telling me, how do I use my words to get my needs met, and how do I accept it- you know- how do I make choices and compromises”.

Some significant problem areas related to a client’s ability to function were also identified in the interviews. Participant #005 responded to the fourth question in the interview protocol noting three problem areas stand out in his current work- trauma, learned helplessness, and self-esteem. He went on to explain that these particular clients

“are glaringly apparent when working with horses”. He noted that he finds it useful to incorporate mindfulness techniques, use of positive affirmations, and attentiveness into his work to support these individuals and that having small group sizes with an average of 8-15 clients also helps when working with those with trauma.

The relevance to the theme of overall improvement in client function was also seen when the next question in the protocol was asked, even though it explored the idea of guiding theory. To reiterate, the fifth question in my interview protocol focused more on theoretical influence on the work they do and read: “Are there particular theorists whose work you find especially helpful in working with your client population?”

Participant #001 identified the work of Dr. Daniel Hughes and DDT as notable. She shared how it has influenced the work she does with their population of focus that experiences a variety of challenges related to trauma, emotional regulation, and attachment related disorders. She gave more applicable experience of how this is used in the next question in the interview protocol.

The response of participant #004 to this same question while looking more closely at theoretical connections identified how the use of an attachment-based approach known as trust-based relational intervention (TBRI) with the population she serves has been relevant. She places focus on the meeting of basic needs and establishing a sense of safety in the clients internal environment as an initial treatment focus which includes getting enough sleep, addressing basic needs like hunger and thirst, all of which improves their ability to cope and function better in terms of emotional regulation. She also affirmed the usefulness of groundwork according to the EAGALA model, however

expressed interest in the methods used by colleagues that utilize the PATH model involving riding the horse.

Participant #005 also referenced an improvement in client function and noted most of his training has been focused on the Fundamentals of Natural Lifemanship because the focus is on trauma and recovering from its effects. He also cited training and certification he received from Greg Kirsten who is the founder of the OK Corral series as being influential in the work he does as well as the horsemanship experience he gained from internationally known clinician and horseman Mike Bridges who has spent over 16 years teaching clinics in the United States and Europe. He went on to note “I spent most of my life until I was 40 in the agricultural business. I have a lot of practical life experience that I use as well that supports the equine side of things which I have found is extremely helpful”.

To add to this, the sixth question in my interview protocol served to further explain in greater detail how theory or certain theorists might have influenced the actual work they do and read as follows: “Do you use any of this work with your clients and if so, how?” Participant #001 noted that the previously mentioned DDT is what she uses stating “it’s what sets up the framework and it absolutely guides every single session and how we approach clients”. She went on to say “that experiential model or modality absolutely guides practice because you have to set sessions up in a way to play out- you know with incorporating the horses- then they really become sort of the metaphor and the symbol as does everything in the space, everything around the space”.

In addition to this she noted “anything can become representative of the client’s story, so there is a lot of symbolism and metaphor that comes into play too.” Lastly, she mentioned how this can help clients that are transitioning through the stages of change noting that when clients are “not even aware that there perhaps is a problem somewhere- or in tune to what perhaps is going on- you know helping clients in the pre-contemplative stage of change all the way through preparing to make change and then actually taking action to make that change.”

Going back to our earlier discussion on client-centered approaches and how each client has individualized care based on their unique needs, participant #002 spoke in more detail about how each client has “their own little team” of staff and noted “as they become more independent we want to move them forward with the skill set so that they feel good about themselves and they don’t get bored and the horses don’t get bored”. She elaborated further on this by stating “The client centered piece for me is more emotional than it is physically- to improve someone’s physicality” and added “It’s all about being tuned in to that rider’s behavior that day, their emotions that day, what we did that week and what we taught about that week- it is the client drives the interaction as opposed to the facilitator driving the interaction because she has got a plan.”

The response obtained from participant #003 regarding this related to our prior discussion on the concept of Biophilia. When I asked what this would look like when used in sessions with clients she stated “I would say that it really is about attending to what is happening at the moment in the barn. And it also sort of works in conjunction very nicely with some of the aspects of EAGALA which is a certification I have- It’s like

one of the approaches of doing equine-assisted psychotherapy, but it is very much based in experiential learning”. To further this she added “so by using the EAGALA method formed by this concept of Biophilia I focus a lot on slowing things down and what is happening around us in the barn” and noted “I spend a lot of time talking about horse cues and people cues like how do we come to understand horses so that- so that we can know how to interact with them safely”.

A different participant responded to this same question by noting the most consistent thing that she does from an equine standpoint is their weekly groups. Participant #004 shared that the groups, which are not closed in nature, run on a 6-week rotation and utilize the EAGALA approach that utilizes both a mental health professional and an equine-specialist to work with their clients. She went on to state “there really isn’t one particular counseling theory that we adhere to”, but did go on to say they do use the “eclectic” treatment model trust-based relational intervention (TBRI) which takes into account the past trauma, abuse, and or neglect experienced by the population they serve in her program, whether that be due to organic brain disorder, behavioral issues, environmental issues and how to support not just the client, but the family also to have an improved outcome as a result of their treatment involvement.

The final respondent to this question, participant #005 shared that everything he does traces back to helping the clients overcome their fear, learned helplessness, and self esteem issues noting “I work off of intuition and the way I feel” noting that each of the clients they work with is already working with a primary therapist who has developed a treatment plan and takes care of the documentation aspect so he can focus on the work

with the horses and the interaction that is taking place between the client and the horse noting “I watch for everything” noting that he has two rules that start every group “have fun” and “ask for help” and how the clients handle those two rules tell him a lot about their needs. He noted that most of their sessions focus on two aspects- “looking at a situation and solving a problem- and most all problems can be solved by asking somebody for help”.

Relating closely to this theme on improving client function, the seventh question in the interview protocol read as follows: “What are some indicators you use to determine if your clients are meeting treatment outcomes?” Participant #001 spoke about the use of a pre and post test outcome questionnaire to help her measure the success rate of the clients she works with. She cited how the use of these assessments as part of the treatment process shows if there is “an improvement in overall client distress”. Lastly she noted that “in core sessions we sit down and attempt an assessment and we set forth goals for the treatment planning and we also go back to the treatment plan so that gives us a way to track progression and change”.

This same participant went on to explain more of how this process relates to the DDT approaches she uses and how she starts by helping the clients identify the stress and express the distress noting “You know if you have a young client- or a client who has so much compounded trauma and issues then they might not know exactly where the issues stem from we spend a lot of time increasing awareness and mindfulness around what is happening”. She went on to add “The ability to even first identify the stress and express the distress- that can take months in itself so then hopefully we get to a place that they

are ready to create change or to learn to cope with that and work through that”.

Participant #001 finished expanding on this by noting that the DDT program is focused on attachment and sometimes involves them transitioning through different developmental stages. Lastly, she noted “those issues run so deep that it is a longer time in treatment- we have folks that are 6 months to a year, but we have also had folks that have been here for several years and we continue to be a very stabilizing place in their functioning” citing a psychoanalytic piece to the treatment she does and mentioning the Gestaltsystemic approach.

Another participant placed the treatment planning process as the primary way she tracks progression and outcomes in treatment. In response to my question participant #003 noted “I would say by the second or third session we have a treatment plan in place with specific goals and objectives that I would say 95% of the time I would create with the clients and we agree on goals and outcomes that they want to work on and then we assess that in every session”. She further elaborated this process stating “I assess that at every session keeping notes and depending on the length of treatment periodically assess that with clients so it is a pretty fluid process of assessing in conversation with the client how they feel things are going- it just depends on the client what their goals are but they are quite specific and for clients I work with longer I get into deeper layers of work”.

Participant #004 responded to this question by expressing that an indicator of progress towards improving client function is how well the clients she serves are able to recognize what their body is telling them, as well as seeing them improve in their ability to use communication to get their needs met in an appropriate way. Their ability to

convey basic needs and manage self care such as drinking enough water and getting enough sleep also relates to the outcomes and how well the client may be responding to the directives given by the therapist. She noted “we have a treatment model when you come into the behavior regulation program- there is a parent component and they meet with another therapist and they do about 4 weeks of the treatment model the trust-based relational intervention (TBRI)- like how do I connect with my kid in order to correct my kid? Connection before correction, we talk a lot about self safety”.

She also provided additional clarification on what self-safety consists of by stating “So in order to have self safety I have to teach my kids about how they have to make sure their inside environment and their outside environment is safe and the one they have the most control over is their inside environment”. She went on to explain that the “inside environment” involves making sure they are not hungry, thirsty, or tired. In addition to this she noted when those basic needs are met, they tend to do better in the therapy sessions overall. This keeps with this theme of improvement in overall ability to function.

This same participant also provided an additional response to this question that looked more closely at proving efficacy, stating “It is interesting to me- I believe that there are going to be so many ways to look at the efficacy of it- doing specific research on how successful- you are going to be pretty general about what is success and what’s not, right? Because, there are so many ways...”. She elaborated on this response further stating “but if you generalize it- from the horse standpoint- like PATH is specific, but even within PATH there are so many ways to document success”. The remainder of their

response then shifted towards equine-assisted psychotherapy as a billable service with her noting “Everyone is trying to get insurance to cover it as experiential”. She elaborated on this stating “Technically play therapy, sand therapy, art therapy- all of that- there is an extra code that you can add outside of individual or family but so many insurance companies don’t cover that- there are very few that cover equine specifically but anytime you ask what the code is and it is the same interactive therapy code”. In closing she noted the challenge to this stating “they can’t determine the difference between our therapy and equine therapy. Horses have to have an empirical database associated with it”.

Lastly, participant #005 brought up the importance of spirituality to human functioning and noted for them there is a spiritual component and that horses are always living in the present and have the ability to teach humans how to be mindful and live in the present too which helps with improving their ability to function in the current moment. He noted in closing

I feel I have really been blessed by God- my interaction with horses over the years- I was kid and I actually broke my first horse when I was probably 7 or 8 and I’ve been blessed to have really good people and challenging horses in my life and I really feel that in this business you have the blessing of intuitiveness and I feel like God has really blessed me with the ability to see into people and if I can see into people I can help them- I believe in a God that is definitely concerned about each one of us as his children and I feel that blessing when I start working with people and get little inspirations that happen in different things that support positive things in their lives.

Given this information, an improvement in spiritual functioning is also another potential area to examine when evaluating whether a client experiencing benefits of such interventions.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the three identified themes and related subthemes that emerged from the participant responses to my interview protocol: Sense of Belonging, Empowerment, and Client Function. Identifying these themes and subthemes supported the process of answering the original research question identified by my study: How do therapists who say they are doing equine-assisted psychotherapy understand what is taking place between the client and the horse? As previously noted the research question was developed to identify the individual experiences and perception of the study participants and according to the broad range of responses received in response to the interview protocol, it seems to have functioned in this capacity.

Although I was hoping to identify additional themes related to the theories and evidence based practices that are used to guide equine-assisted psychotherapy, it appears that no singular theory takes precedent rather each therapist utilized a combination of their personal experiences and professional background and training to create their approaches to working with the clients and horses. There seems to be more of an eclectic or an existential approach being used to guide the therapeutic interventions and these may be worth considering as a possible framework for equine-assisted psychotherapy, especially existential psychotherapy (Binwanger & Angel, 1958). In addition to this, the need to individualize services for the unique needs of each of the populations served by

the participants became apparent during the interview process and by the responses provided to each of the questions in my interview protocol.

Overall, it is important to reiterate that this study was exploratory and as noted in the prior section on assumptions these findings should be interpreted with caution. The findings from this study should serve as a point of reference for future studies. It is my hope the identified themes can be evaluated more thoroughly and guide future research in the area of equine-assisted psychotherapy.

In Chapter 5 I will revisit why I decided to conduct my study. I will also summarize and interpret my dialogue with the literature and the key findings of my study in relation to the theoretical foundation I expanded on in Chapter 2. Lastly, I will identify the limitations of my study as well as future recommendations for research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

To begin, the purpose of my study was to identify how therapists who perform equine-assisted psychotherapy understand the interaction between the client and the horse. I was attempting to develop a better understanding of the similarities and differences in the thinking of the therapists who participated in the study. I also hoped to establish whether any theoretical or observational influences existed in their practice that can be used to further define what takes place in this form of therapy. The field of equine-assisted psychotherapy is still evolving and although currently considered experimental it is becoming more widely recognized and interest in its clinical applications is increasing. I hope my research findings will help with the eventual development of a theoretical basis for use in clinical practice.

Key findings of my study based upon the responses of the five participants reinforced the idea that equine-assisted psychotherapy is being used with a wide variety of populations and in a number of very individualized ways lacking a standardized approach in the way it is implemented program to program. Although some of the participants utilized specific training and application methods set forth by EAGALA and PATH International, for example, others used combined personal and professional experiences paired with other trainings and methodologies that they felt were relevant to the work they were doing.

In addition to this, when looking more closely at the problem statement identified by my study and how the therapist understands what is taking place between the client

and the horse, three notable themes emerged based on the interview responses. These themes mentioned previously are as follows: clients developing a sense of belonging or connectedness, client empowerment, and an improvement in clients' overall ability to function. All three of these underlying themes may be used to inform future studies and serve as the basis for clinical practice in the field of equine-assisted psychotherapy.

Interpretation of the Findings

The existing research on the field of equine-assisted psychotherapy, as was illustrated in Chapter 2, has served as a helpful foundation and supports why additional research is needed. Although my sample size was small, consisting of five participants, this was enough to confirm and support what the other existing research has indicated on a larger scale, which is that equine-assisted psychotherapy is being used in a variety of ways with a variety of populations of focus and lacks uniformity. Each participant described very different applications of therapy approaches and although some similarities existed such as the use of treatment plans to identify goals for the therapy sessions, in most cases there were more differences than similarities which seemed dependent on the population they served and what training and experience each individual therapist had received that guided their practice.

As for the theoretical foundation, all of the participants offered feedback indicative of some theory or model that influenced the work they do with their respective populations of focus. All five participants relayed in the interviews that a combination of their lived experiences and professional training were used together with this to develop and implement the practice methods they were using in the programs in which they

worked doing equine-assisted psychotherapy. Additionally, all but one of the participants mentioned multiple influential theories and/or models that they find relevant to the work they do.

Interestingly, three of the participants made some reference to attachment theory and the related seminal literature (Ainsworth, 1985, 1989, 2015; Bowlby, 1988, 2008, 2012; Bowlby & Ainsworth, 2013). This theory was also referenced by previous studies on equine-assisted psychotherapy (Bachi, 2013; Bachi & Parish-Plass, 2017; Maujean et al., 2013; Masini, 2010; Parish-Plass, 2013). The relevance of this theory to equine-assisted psychotherapy was especially apparent when exploring the theme of having a sense of belonging and the connectedness between people and horses, in this case specifically the participants involved in equine-assisted psychotherapy and the horses used in those programs.

This has several useful implications, the first of which is it could potentially be used to measure outcomes and efficacy of the therapeutic value of such interaction. In addition, it can also be used to look more deeply at variables of connectedness in this form of therapy including spiritual, emotional, and physical realms. Attachment theory has already been integrated into some clinical practice involving equine-assisted psychotherapy and research supports additional development of interventions using it (Bachi & Parish-Plass, 2017).

Attachment theory was not the only theory that was identified during the data collection process as being relevant to equine-assisted psychotherapy. One participant referenced Gestalt therapy, which I had discovered during my review of the existing data

and provided a detailed explanation in Chapter 2. The use of Gestalt therapy approaches in conjunction with equine-assisted psychotherapy has also been documented in the current existing literature (Kirby, 2010; Lac, 2016). Additionally, the term existential was used by one of the participants when referencing equine-assisted psychotherapy, which relates closely to the work of Soren Kierkegaard, whose contribution was also explored in the literature review (Kierkegaard, 1960, 1967).

The therapists also spoke in great detail about their training experiences; for example, one spoke of trauma-informed care and the work of Bessel Van Der Kolk (2014) as being instrumental in their work with the horses and their clients with trauma. Based on the findings of my study, the use of equine-assisted psychotherapy to treat individuals who have experienced some form of trauma seems to be a common factor across all five of my participants, all of whom noted that they had worked with individuals that had experienced trauma in some way. A number of studies also support the assumption that equine-assisted psychotherapy can be a targeted approach to be used with populations that have experienced trauma (Bachi, 2014; Burgon, 2011; Dell et al., 2011; Kemp et al., 2014; Krennek, 2013; Mota, 2014).

Limitations of the Study

As with any study limitations did exist. As noted previously, all participants in my study from the United States, and were not limited to one region or demographic area. The field of equine-assisted psychotherapy is not strictly limited to the United States and is being used on an international scale as well, so my study findings while still applicable in some regards, will not account for any differences in practice that may exist in other

countries outside of the United States. Additionally, my past role as a mental health therapist and my personal history of owning and working with horses may have in some ways impacted my ability to interpret my study findings, although I made every attempt to remain aware of my bias. In addition to this, I was especially careful not to project my assumption that horses are beneficial to one's personal, mental, and physical wellbeing when I was interviewing participants.

Recommendations

As I mentioned in previous sections, this study was exploratory in nature and meant to be a starting point for future studies in the area of equine-assisted psychotherapy, even more specifically to the thought process that guides the clinical practice of the therapist's performing such work. I have some recommendations in terms of future studies that may be conducted using my findings as a basis, the first of which would be to expand the sample size to include participants from as many of the 50 states as possible, or conduct studies in specific demographic regions to compare and contrast (i.e.: New England, Midwest, etc.). This recommendation comes from my discovery that each individual state appears to have their own licensing standards, credentialing requirements, and in some cases their own certification processes related to the practice of equine-assisted psychotherapy. This recommendation could also be expanded to include international areas since the use of equine-assisted psychotherapy is not exclusive to the United States and is being used in many countries around the world.

Additionally, more attention could be given to the actual personal demographics of the participants chosen for future studies. Gender was one area in which there was a

variable since four of my participants were female and only one of the therapist's was male. Although this may not have had an impact on outcomes, there is simply no way to know unless a study is conducted that looks at variables such as gender and age in relation to the participants, their perceptions, and their responses.

Lastly, a larger sample size would confirm findings and perhaps even offer additional data not captured in my study. I had originally intended to interview up to 10 participants, however unforeseen challenges with my recruitment phase related to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a smaller sample size of 5. Although this was still helpful and provided much insight into my topic of study, more participants may have resulted in additional themes being recognized.

Implications for Social Change

It was my greatest intention when conducting this study to influence some level of positive social change. My study only serves as a starting point and offers helpful considerations for future research that may also influence growth in terms of the clinical application of equine-assisted psychotherapy. Once we can begin to understand how the therapists performing this work perceive the interaction between the clients and the horses and the work they do therapeutically, more contributions are made to the research that supports it as evidence-based practice. This will potentially lead to more developments in the field that will provide the recognition it needs to be considered more than a form of experiential therapy.

This may also begin to fill a gap that exists in the identified knowledge base about equine-assisted psychotherapy, clarifying some aspects of the existing knowledge base

and helping to identify further gaps in the understanding of this therapy method.

Through my work, I had hoped to clarify what is known and what is not yet known about the thinking behind some of the clinical practice methods of the therapists using equine-assisted psychotherapy. With these findings I attempted to support the social change process that seems to be developing as the field of equine-assisted psychotherapy matures and the need for theoretical guidance becomes more apparent.

Conclusion

Equine-assisted psychotherapy continues to evolve and grow as it gains popularity as a treatment option for a wide variety of populations. There is an ongoing need to continue to research and gain a greater understanding of all of the various ways it is being implemented both to evaluate efficacy, and also to support the validity of it as a form of evidence-based practice that can be used as more than an experimental form of therapy. Results from my study suggest that equine-assisted psychotherapy can be used effectively in a variety of ways with a variety of populations, but this process is guided primarily by the individual therapists based off of a combination of their personal experiences and professional training. This study serves as a starting point for future studies, perhaps focused on grounded theory as the clinical practices of therapist's performing equine-assisted psychotherapy continues to evolve and gain competency that aligns with those practicing other evidence-based therapy approaches.

References

- Adams, C., Arratoon, C., Boucher, J., Cartier, G., Chalmers, D., Dell, C. A., Dryka, D., Duncan, R., Dunn, K., Hopkins, C., Longclaws, L., Mackinnon, T., Sauve, E., Spence, S., & Wuttinee, M. (2015). The helping horse: How equine-assisted learning contributes to the wellbeing of First Nations youth in treatment for volatile substance misuse. *Human-Animal Interaction Bulletin*, 1(1), 52.
- Ainsworth, M. D. (1985). Patterns of attachment. *Clinical Psychologist*, 38(2), 27-29.
- Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. N. (2015). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Psychology Press.
- Ainsworth, M. S. (1989). Attachments beyond infancy. *American Psychologist*, 44(4), 709.
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/5431/41e657bda74736ff87ac10d70643cd639892.pdf>
- Ajzen, I. (1985). From intentions to actions: A theory of planned behavior. In *Action Control* (pp. 11-39). Springer Berlin Heidelberg.
<http://server2.docfoc.com/uploads/Z2015/12/26/e7221cvpXc/ed1cbb4e047109f8f53e9202bb6d7818.pdf>
- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179-211.
- Amankwaa, L., Solomon, S. (2016). Creating Protocols for Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research. *Journal of Cultural Diversity*, 23(3):121-127.

- American Hippotherapy Association. (2014). *Hippotherapy as a treatment strategy*. <http://www.americanhippotherapyassociation.org/hippotherapy/hippotherapy-as-a-treatment-strategy/>
- American Psychological Association. (2018). *Five principles for research ethics*. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/jan03/principles.aspx>
- Amankwaa, L. (2016). Creating protocols for trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Cultural Diversity, 23*(3), 121–127.
- Andelora, J. F. (2017). *The Zen horseman*. https://arizona.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10150/624904/azu_etd_hr_2017_0008_sip1_m.pdf;jsessionid=B17F15D25E845AB2F98AC6CFDAC15CE1?sequence=1
- Angsupaisal, M., Visser, B., Alkema, A., Meinsma-van der Tuin, M., Maathuis, C. G., Reinders-Messelink, H., & Hadders-Algra, M. (2015). Therapist-designed adaptive riding in children with cerebral palsy: Results of a feasibility study. *Physical Therapy, 95*(8), 1151–1162. <https://doi.org/10.2522/ptj.20140146>
- Auta, A., Strickland-Hodge, B., & Maz, J. (2017). There is still a case for generic qualitative approach in some pharmacy practice research. *Research in Social and Administrative Pharmacy, 13*(1) 266-268.
- Bachi, K. (2012). Equine-facilitated psychotherapy: The gap between practice and knowledge. *Society & Animals, 20*(4), 364-380. <http://www.animalsandsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/bachi.pdf>

- Bachi, K. (2013). Application of attachment theory to equine-facilitated psychotherapy. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 43(3), 187-196.
- Bachi, K. (2013). *Life cycle analysis of the equine-facilitated psychotherapy field. Animal-Assisted psychotherapy: Theory, Issues, and Practice*. Purdue University Press.
- Bachi, K. (2014). An equine-facilitated prison-based program: Human-horse relations and effects on inmate emotions and behaviors. CUNY Academic Works. http://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/162
- Bachi, K., & Parish-Plass, N. (2017). Animal-assisted psychotherapy: A unique relational therapy for children and adolescents. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 22(1), 3-8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104516672549>
- Barrett, D., & Twycross, A. (2018). Data collection in qualitative research. *Evidence-based nursing*, 21(3), 63-64. <https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2018-102939>
- Bateman, A. & Fonagy, P. (2010). Mentalization based treatment for borderline personality disorder. *World Psychiatry*, 9(1), 11-15. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/j.2051-5545.2010.tb00255.x>
- Bennett, B., & Woodman, E. (2019). The potential of equine-assisted psychotherapy for treating trauma in Australian Aboriginal peoples. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 49(4), 1041-1058.
- Binswanger, L. & Angel, E.T. (1958). The existential analysis school of thought.

- Belotto, M. J. (2018). Data analysis methods for qualitative research: Managing the challenges of coding, interrater reliability, and thematic analysis. *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem*, 71, 2622–2633.
- Beutler, L. E., & Consoli, A. J. (1992). Systematic eclectic psychotherapy. In J. C. Norcross & M. R. Goldfried (Eds.), *Handbook of Psychotherapy Integration* (pp. 264-299). Basic Books.
- Binswanger, L. (1963). *Being-in-the-world: Selected Papers of L. Binswanger*. Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (2008). *Attachment*. Basic Books.
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/0cf3/524fa9a2f7989eaa64cf8f094d3182add3c7.pdf>
- Bowlby, J. (2012). *A secure base*. Routledge. <https://www.abebe.org.br/files/John-Bowlby-A-Secure-Base-Parent-Child-Attachment-and-Healthy-Human-Development-1990.pdf>
- Bowlby, J. & Ainsworth, M. (2013). The origins of attachment theory. *Attachment Theory: Social, Developmental, and Clinical Perspectives*, 45. http://www.psychology.sunysb.edu/attachment/online/inge_origins.pdf
- Brandt, C. & Cities, T. (2013). Equine-facilitated psychotherapy as a complementary treatment intervention. *The Practitioner Scholar: Journal of Counseling and Professional Psychology*, 2, 23-42.
<http://accessequinetherapy.org/documents/11108-43021-1-PB.pdf>

- Bretherton, I. (1992). The origins of attachment theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. *Developmental Psychology*, 28(5), 759-775. Doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.28.5.759.
- Bryant, A. (2021). Continual permutations of misunderstanding: The curious incidents of the grounded theory method. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 27(3-4), 397-411.
- Burgon, H. L. (2011). 'Queen of the world': Experiences of 'at-risk' young people participating in equine-assisted learning/therapy. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 25(02), 165-183.
- Burgon, H. L. (2014). Background to equine-assisted therapy and learning. *Equine-Assisted therapy and learning with at-risk young people* (pp. 6-34). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Burgon, H., Gammage, D., & Hebden, J. (2018). Hoofbeats and heartbeats: equine-assisted therapy and learning with young people with psychosocial issues—theory and practice. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 32(1), 3-16.
- Caelli, K., Ray, L., & Mill, J. (2003). 'Clear as mud': Toward greater clarity in general qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(2), 1–24.
- Carcary, M. (2020). The research audit trail: Methodological guidance for application in practice. *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 18(2), pp166-177.
- Carlsson C. (2016). Triads in equine-assisted social work enhance therapeutic relationships with self-harming adolescents. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 45(4), 320-331. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5684297/>

- Carlsson, C., Ranta, D. N., & Traeen, B. (2015). Mentalizing and emotional labor facilitate equine-assisted social work with self-harming adolescents. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 32(4), 329-339.
- Carter, S., & Laurs, D. (2014). *Developing generic support for doctoral students: Practice and pedagogy*. Routledge.
- Central Kentucky Riding For Hope (2018). Organizational Website: <http://www.ckrh.org/overview.htm>
- Cerino, S., Cirulli, F., Chiarotti, F., & Seripa, S. (2011). Non-conventional psychiatric rehabilitation in schizophrenia using therapeutic riding: the FISE multicentre Pindar project. *Annali dell'Istituto superiore di Sanita*, 47(4), 409-414.
- Chang, D. F. (2014). Increasing the trustworthiness of qualitative research with member checking. *Increasing the Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research with Member Checking*. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1037/e530492014-001>
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing Grounded Theory*. Sage Publications. <http://lib.uok.ac.ir:8080/multiMediaFile/154540577-4-1.pdf>
- Charmaz, K., & Belgrave, L. L. (2019). Thinking about data with grounded theory. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25(8), 743-753.
- Chun Tie, Y., Birks, M., & Francis, K. (2019). Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers. *SAGE open medicine*, 7, 2050312118822927.
- Clark, K. R., & Vealé, B. L. (2018). Strategies to enhance data collection and analysis in qualitative research. *Radiologic Technology*, 89(5), 482CT–485CT.

- Connelly, L. M. (2016). Understanding research. Trustworthiness in qualitative research. *MEDSURG Nursing*, 25(6), 435–436. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30304614/>
- Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. (2014). Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory, 4th edition. Sage Publications.
- Corley, K. G. (2015). A commentary on ‘what grounded theory is...’ engaging a phenomenon from the perspective of those living it. *Organizational Research Methods*, 18(4), 600-605.
- Dampsey, E. (2017). The effects of equine-assisted psychotherapy on emotion regulation: Self-efficacy and self-awareness as potential mediators. Dissertation. <https://www.heartmath.org/assets/uploads/2017/10/effect-of-equine-assisted-psychotherapy-on-emotion-regulation.pdf>
- Dell, C. A., Chalmers, D., Bresette, N., Swain, S., Rankin, D., & Hopkins, C. (2011, August). A healing space: The experiences of First Nations and Inuit youth with equine-assisted learning (EAL). In *Child & Youth Care Forum* (Vol. 40, No. 4, pp. 319-336). Springer US.
- Diane, G. C., (2014). Methods and meanings: Credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*. (1)89. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1188/14.ONF.89-91>
- Dimond, R. E., Havens, R. A., & Jones, A. C. (1978). A conceptual framework for the practice of prescriptive eclecticism in psychotherapy. *American Psychologist*, 33(3), 239-248. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.33.3.239.

- Downes, M., Dean, R., & Bath-Hextall, F. (2013). Animal-assisted therapy for people with serious mental illness. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*. Issue 12, Art. No:CD010818. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD010818.
<https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD010818/full>
- Elliott, A. (2015). *Psychoanalytic theory: An introduction*. Macmillan International Higher Education.
- Elliott, R., & Timulak, L. (2021). *Essentials of descriptive-interpretive qualitative research: A generic approach*. American Psychological Association.
- Escobar, M. (2021). Perceived holistic benefits of equine-assisted therapy among mothers of children with a disability: a pilot study. *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, 23(1), 23-46.
- Equine-Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) (2012)
<http://www.eagala.org/Information/>
- Evans, D. R., Hearn, M. T., Uhlemann, M. R., & Ivey, A. E. (2017). *Essential interviewing: A programmed approach to effective communication*. Nelson Education.
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.459.323&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Fink, A.S. (2000). The role of the researcher in the qualitative research process: A potential barrier to archiving qualitative data. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol 1, Iss 3 (2000), (3).
<https://ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?>

[direct=true&db=edsdoj&AN=edsdoj.0a1a3f01cf9a489f809248397d51e755&site=eds-live&scope=site](https://edsdoj.com/edsdoj/0a1a3f01cf9a489f809248397d51e755?direct=true&db=edsdoj&AN=edsdoj.0a1a3f01cf9a489f809248397d51e755&site=eds-live&scope=site)

Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (1977). *Belief, attitude, intention, and behavior: An introduction to theory and research*. Addison-Wesley, 1975.

Frankl, V. (1986) [1955]. *The Doctor and the soul: From psychotherapy to logotherapy*, 3rd ed. Trans. Vintage.

Freud, S. (1964). *An outline of psychoanalysis, the standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. XXIII). The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis.

Fulmer, R. (2018). The Evolution of the Psychodynamic Approach and System. *International Journal of Psychological Studies*, 10(1).

Gabriels, R. L., Agnew, J. A., Holt, K. D., Shoffner, A., Zhaoxing, P., Ruzzano, S., & Mesibov, G. (2012). Pilot study measuring the effects of therapeutic horseback riding on school-age children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 6(2), 578-588.

García-Gómez, A., Risco, M. L., Rubio, J. C., Guerrero, E., & García-Peña, I. M. (2014). Effects of a program of adapted therapeutic horse-riding in a group of autism spectrum disorder children. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology*, 12(1).

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. Basics.

- Gardner, H. & Hatch, T. (1989). Educational implications of the theory of multiple intelligences. *Educational Researcher*, 18(8), 4-10. <http://www.sfu.ca/~jcnbit/EDUC220/ThinkPaper/Gardner1989.pdf>
- Gardner, H. (2016). 35 Multiple intelligences: Prelude, theory, and aftermath. *Scientists making a difference: One hundred eminent behavioral and brain scientists talk about their most important contributions*, 167. https://howardgardner01.files.wordpress.com/2016/11/scientists-making-a-difference_gardner.pdf
- Gardner, H. (2020). Of Human Potential: A 40-Year Saga. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 43(1), 12–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162353219894406>
- Gergely, E. J. (2012). *Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy: A Descriptive Study*. Dissertations. 107. <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1111&context=dissertations>
- Gfroerer, J., Hedden, S., Barker, P., Bose, J., & Aldworth, J. (2012). Estimating mental illness in an ongoing national survey. *nthCorvey*, 35. http://www.srl.uic.edu/hsrc/hsrc10_proceedings.pdf#page=40
- Glaser, B., Bailyn, L., Fernandez, W., Holton, J. A., & Levina, N. (2013). What Grounded Theory Is... *Academy of Management Proceedings* (Vol. 2013, No. 1, p. 11290). Briarcliff Manor, Academy of Management. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2013.11290symposium>

- Gorden, R. (1992). *Basic Interviewing Skills*. F.E. Peacock. [5-CodingInterviewResponses\(1\).pdf](#)
- Grēve, M. (2021). Horses and Gestalt Coaching: A Promising Combination For Life Skills Learning. In *Society. Integration. Education. Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference* (Vol. 4, pp. 124-135).
- Guba, E.& Lincoln, Y. (1981). *Effective evaluation: improving the usefulness of evaluation results through responsive and naturalistic approaches*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Hallberg, L. (2017). *The clinical practice of equine-assisted therapy: Including horses in human healthcare*. Routledge.
- Hamilton, A. J. (2011). *Zen mind, zen horse: the science and spirituality of working with horses*. Storey Pub., LLC.
- Hannes, K. (2017). Quality assessment of qualitative research studies in the context of literature reviews: Moving smoothly from one decision point to another. *European Congress of Qualitative Inquiry Proceedings 2017*, 135-139.
- Haylock, P.&Cantril, C. (2006). Healing with horses: Fostering recovery from cancerwith horses as therapists. *Journal of Science and Healing*, May; 2(3): 264-268. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/i.explore.2006.03.013>
- Hazan, C.& Shaver, P. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52(3), 511.<http://dx.doi.org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1037/0022-3514.52.3.511>

- Homnick, T. D., Henning, K. M., Swain, C. V. & Homnick, D. N. (2015). The effect of therapeutic horseback riding on balance in community-dwelling older adults: A pilot study. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 34(1), 118-126.
- Hunter, D. & Sawyer, C. (2006). Blending Native American spirituality with individual psychology in work with children. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 62(3).
- Jahja, A. S., Sri Ramalu, S., & Razimi, M. S. A. (2021). Generic qualitative research in management studies. *JRAK (Jurnal Riset Akuntansi Dan Bisnis)*, 7(1), 1-13.
<https://doi.org/10.38204/jrak.v7i1.523>
- Jang, C. H., Joo, M. C., Noh, S. E., Lee, S. Y., Lee, D. B., Lee, S. H., Kim, H. K. & Park, H. I. (2016). Effects of hippotherapy on psychosocial aspects in children with cerebral palsy and their caregivers: A pilot study. *Annals of Rehabilitation Medicine*, 40(2), 230–236. <http://doi.org/10.5535/arm.2016.40.2.230>
- Johansen, S. G., Arfwedson Wang, C. E., Binder, P. E., & Malt, U. F. (2014). Equine-Facilitated body and emotion-oriented psychotherapy designed for adolescents and adults not responding to mainstream treatment: A structured program. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 24(4), 323.
- Johns, L., Bobat, S. & Holder, J. (2016). Therapist experiences of equine-assisted psychotherapy in South Africa: A qualitative study. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 26(2), 199-203.
- Johnson, J. L., Adkins, D., & Chauvin, S. (2020). A review of the quality indicators of rigor in qualitative research. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 84(1), 138–146.

<https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.5688/ajpe7120>

- Jung, H. Y. (1969). Confucianism and existentialism: Intersubjectivity as the way of man. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 30(2), 186-202.
- Kahlke, R. M. (2014). Generic qualitative approaches: Pitfalls and benefits of methodological mixology. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 13(1), 37-52. (PDF) *Generic Qualitative Approaches: Pitfalls....*
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261757778_Generic_Qualitative_Approaches_Pitfalls_and_Benefits_of_Methodological_Mixology
- Kahlke, R.M. (2018). Reflection/ commentary on a past article: “Generic qualitative approaches: Pitfalls and benefits of methodological mixology. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17.
<https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1177/1609406918788193>
- Karagiozis, N. (2018). The complexities of the researcher’s role in qualitative research: The power of reflexivity. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Educational Studies*, 13(1), 19–31.<https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.18848/2327-011X/CGP/v13i01/19-31>
- Kemp, K., Signal, T., Botros, H., Taylor, N., & Prentice, K. (2014). Equine-Facilitated therapy with children and adolescents who have been sexually abused: A program evaluation study. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 23(3), 558-566.
- Kendall, E., Maujean, A., Pepping, C. A., & Wright, J. J. (2014). Hypotheses about the psychological benefits of horses. *Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing*, 10(2), 81-87.

- Kendall, E., Maujean, A., Pepping, C. A., Downes, M., Lakhani, A., Byrne, J., & Macfarlane, K. (2015). A systematic review of the efficacy of equine-assisted interventions on psychological outcomes. *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counseling*, (ahead-of-print), 1-23.
- Kennedy, D.M. (2016). Is it any clearer? Generic qualitative inquiry and the vsaieedc model of data analysis. *Qualitative Report*, 21(8), 1369. <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss8/1/>
- Kierkegaard, S. (1960). *The diary* (Vol. 75). Citadel Press.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1967). *Søren Kierkegaard's journals and papers*, Volume 1: AE. <https://numerov.com/dspace/es/08-45-44.pdf>
- Kirby, M. (2010). Gestalt equine psychotherapy. *Gestalt Journal of Australia and New Zealand*, 6(2), 60.
- Kohanov, L. (2015). *The power of the herd: A non-predatory approach to social intelligence, leadership, and innovation*. New World Library.
- Kornbluh, M. (2015). Combating challenges to establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 12(4), 397–414. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenlibrary.org/10.1080/14780887.2015.1021941>
- Korstjen, I. & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice*, 24(1), 120–124. <https://doiorg.ezp.waldenlibrary.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092>
- Kovács, G., Van Dijke, A., & Enders-Slegers, M. J. (2020). Psychodynamic based

equine-assisted psychotherapy in adults with intertwined personality problems and traumatization: A systematic review. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(16), 5661.

Krenek, N. (2013). Examining effects of equine-assisted activities to help combat veterans improve quality of life. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development*, 50(8), VII.

Lac, V. (2016). Horsing around: Gestalt equine psychotherapy as humanistic play therapy. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 56(2), 194-209. <https://doi.org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1177//0022167814562424>

Lac, V. (2017). Amy's story: An existential-integrative equine-facilitated psychotherapy approach to anorexia nervosa. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 57(3), 301-312.
Doi:10.1177/0022167815627900

Lac, V. (2017). *Equine-Facilitated psychotherapy and learning: The human-equine relational development (HERD) approach*. Academic Press.

Lazarus, A. A. (1989). *The practice of multimodal therapy: Systematic, comprehensive, and effective psychotherapy*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lazarus, A. A. (2002). Multimodal behavior therapy. *Editors-in-Chief*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED470411.pdf>

Lee, P. T. & Makela, C. (2018). Mental health practitioners' strategies in equine-assisted psychotherapy: implications for social work. *Social Work Education*, 37(1), 119-135.

- Lee, C. W., Kim, S. G., & Na, S. S. (2014). The effects of hippotherapy and a horse riding simulator on the balance of children with cerebral palsy. *Journal of Physical Therapy Science*, 26(3), 423-425.
- Lee, P., Dakin, E. & McLure, M. (2016). Narrative synthesis of equine-assisted psychotherapy literature: Current knowledge and future research directions. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 24(3), 225-246.
doi:10.1111/hsc.12201
- Lentini, J. A. Knox, M. S. (2015). Equine-Facilitated psychotherapy with children and adolescents: An update and literature review. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 10(3), 278-305.
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15401383.2015.1023916>
- Lesté-Lasserre, C. (2018). How human behavior impacts horse welfare. *The Horse*. <https://thehorse.com/159701/how-human-behavior-impacts-horse-welfare/>
- Levitt, H. M. (2021). Essentials of critical-constructivist grounded theory research.
- Lichtman, M. (2013). *Qualitative research for the social sciences*. SAGE publications.
- Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E (1985), *Naturalistic inquiry*, Sage, Beverly Hills, CA.
- Lopez, C.M., Qanungo, S., Jenkins, C.M. & Aciemo, R. (2018). Technology as a means to address disparities in mental health research: A guide to “tele-tailoring” your research methods. *Professional Psychology Research and Practice*, 49(1), 57-64.
<http://dx.doi.org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1037/pro0000176>
- Maharaj, N., Kazanjian, A. & Haney, C. J. (2016). The human–canine bond: A sacred relationship. *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, 18(1), 76-89.

- Main, M. & Solomon, J. (1986). Discovery of an insecure-disorganized/disoriented attachment pattern. In T. B. Brazelton & M. W. Yogman (Eds.), *Affective development in infancy* (pp. 95-124). Westport, CT, US: Ablex Publishing.
- Mallon, G. P., Ross, S. B., & Ross, L. (2006). Designing and implementing animal-assisted therapy programs in health and mental health organizations. In *Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy (Second Edition)* (pp. 115-127).
- Martin, P. Y. & Turner, B. A. (1986). Grounded theory and organizational research. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 22(2), 141-157.
- Masini, A. (2010). Equine-assisted psychotherapy in clinical practice. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services*, 48(10), 30-34.
- Maujean, A., Kendall, E., Lillan, R., Sharp, T., & Pringle, G. (2013). Connecting for health: Playing with horses as a therapeutic tool. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 41(4), 515-522.
- May, R. & Yalom, I. (2000). Existential psychotherapy. *Current Psychotherapies*, 6, 273-302.
- https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C39&q=origins+of+existential+psychotherapy+Nietzsche+and+Kierkegaard&btnG
- Maziere, C. & Gunnlaugson, O. (2015). A case for developing spiritual intelligence in leaders through equine-facilitated learning. *The Journal of Values-Based Leadership*, 8(1), 10.

- Meek, R. (2012). The Horse Course at HMP/YOI Portland: Interim evaluation findings. Retrieved from: <http://hopereinstherapy.com/pdfs/Resources%20-%20Eval-THC.pdf>
- Mihas, P. & Odum Institute. (2019). *Learn to Build a Codebook for a Generic Qualitative Study*. SAGE Publications, Limited.
- Miller, Z. D. (2017). The enduring use of the theory of planned behavior, *Human Dimensions of Wildlife*, 22:6, 583-590, DOI: [10.1080/10871209.2017.1347967](https://doi.org/10.1080/10871209.2017.1347967)
- Morris, A. (2015). *A practical introduction to in-depth interviewing*. Sage Publications. <https://scholar.valpo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://scholar.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1119&context=jvbl>
- Moss, D. (1999). *Humanistic and transpersonal psychology: A historical and biographical sourcebook*. Greenwood Press/Greenwood. <http://union-street-health-associates.com/articles/laura-perls-and-gestalt-therapy.pdf>
- Mota, B. (2014). Allowing horses to heal: The healing power of equines in therapeutic settings. https://www.winona.edu/counseloreducation/Media/Allowing_Horses_t_Heal_-_Spring_2014_Capstone.pdf
- Move-Lac, V., Marble, E., & Boie, I. (2013). Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy as a creative relational approach to treating clients with eating disorders. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 8(4), 483-498.

Needleman, J. (1965). *Being-in-the-world: Selected papers of Ludwig Binswanger*.

<http://users.clas.ufl.edu/burt/touchyfeelingsmaliciousobjects/binswangerextravaganance.pdf>

Nietzsche, F. W. (1968). *Basic writings of Nietzsche* (Vol. 1). Modern

Library. <https://www.hispacultur.org/book/419249954/download-basic-writings-of-nietzsche-friedrich-nietzsche-peter-gay.pdf>

Noble, H. & Smith, J. (2015). Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative

research. *Evidence-Based Nursing*, ebnurs-

2015. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/2723/8066a462278e3f4d73f28e89947c9002c2ba.pdf>

Notgrass, C. G. & Pettinelli, J. D. (2015). Equine-assisted psychotherapy: The Equine

Assisted Growth and Learning Association's model overview of equine-based

modalities. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 38(2), 162-174. *Academic Search*

Complete, EBSCOhost.

Nurenberg, J. R., Schleifer, S., Madara, B., Yellin, M., Desai, P., Shaffer, T., & Allen, A.

(2011). Equine-assisted psychotherapy for patients with severe chronic

psychiatric disorders. *Presentation at the annual meeting of the American*

Psychiatric Association, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Parish-Plass, N. (Ed.). (2013). *Animal-assisted psychotherapy: Theory, issues, and*

practice. Purdue University Press.

http://www.academia.edu/5415847/AnimalAssisted_Psychotherapy_Theory_Issues_and_Practice

- Park, E. S., Rha, D. W., Shin, J. S., Kim, S., & Jung, S. (2014). Effects of hippotherapy on gross motor function and functional performance of children with cerebral palsy. *Yonsei Medical Journal*, 55(6), 1736-1742.
- Parker, G., Roy, K., &Eyers, K. (2014). Cognitive behavior therapy for depression? Choose horses for courses. *American Journal of Psychiatry*.
- PATH Intl. (2013). About PATH International. Organizational website.
<http://www.pathintl.org/about-path-intl/about-path-intl>
- Percy, W. H., Kostere, K., &Kostere, S. (2015). Generic qualitative research in psychology. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(2), 76-85.
- Perls, F., Hefferline, G. & Goodman, P. (1951). *Gestalt therapy*.<http://www.gettingunstuck.com/cpu/PSY412/Overhead/GESTALT%20THERAPY%20OH.pdf>
- Pietkiewicz, I.& Smith, J. A. (2014). A practical guide to using interpretative phenomenological analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Psychological Journal*, 20(1), 7-14.
- Podolsky, E. (1962). The logotherapy of Viktor Frankl. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*. Volume 4, Issue 1 [p. 9-11]. ISSN: 0019-5545 Online ISSN: 1998-3794
- Polit, D.F. & Beck, C.T. (2014). *Essentials of nursing research: Appraising evidence for nursing practice* (8th ed.). Wolters Kluwer/Lippincott Williams & Wilkins
- Pollock, M., Williams, R., & Gomez, S. (2017). Animals as icebreakers: A pilotanimal-assisted therapy group forveteranswith serious mental illness.*International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*. Vol 21 (1) 123-

135. https://www.psychosocial.com/IJPR_21/Animals_as_Icebreakers_Pollock.html

Pozzebon, M. (2018). ThinkBox: From aseptic distance to passionate engagement:

Reflections about the place and value of participatory inquiry. *RAUSP*

Management Journal, 53, 280–284. [https://doi-](https://doi-org.ezp.waldenlibrary.org/10.1016/j.rauspm.2018.02.002)

[org.ezp.waldenlibrary.org/10.1016/j.rauspm.2018.02.002](https://doi-org.ezp.waldenlibrary.org/10.1016/j.rauspm.2018.02.002)

Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (2016).

Organizational Website: <http://www.pathintl.org>

Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (2017).

Organizational Website: <https://www.pathintl.org/60-resources/efpl/1029-learn-about-eaat-equine-assisted-learning>

Puchalski, C. (2006). Spiritual assessment in clinical practice. *Psychiatric Annals*, 36(3), 150.

Quinton, T., & Brunton, J. (2017). Implicit processes, self-regulation, and interventions for behavior change. *Front. Psychol.*, 08 March 2017.

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00346/full>

RÅheim, M., Magnussen, L. H., TveitSekse, R. J., Lunde, Å., Jacobsen, T., & Blystad, A.

(2016). Researcher-Researched relationship in qualitative research: Shifts in positions and researcher vulnerability. *International Journal of Qualitative*

Studies on Health & Well-Being, 11, 1–12.

<https://doi-org.ezp.waldenlibrary.org/10.3402/qhw.v11.30996>

- Reitinger, C. (2015). Existential Analysis. *Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*, 26(2), 344-357. Database: Academic Search Complete.
- Renate, M., Kahlke, B.A., & Hon, M. (2014). Generic qualitative approaches: Pitfalls and benefits of methodological mixology. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol 13 (2014).
<https://doi.org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1177/160940691401300119>
- Rigby, B. R. & Grandjean, P. W. (2016). The efficacy of equine-assisted activities and therapies on improving physical function. *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 22(1), 9-24.
- Rowley, J. (2014). Designing and using research questionnaires. *Management Research Review*, 37(3). 308-330.
- Rubin, H. J. & Rubin, I. S. (2011). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Sage Publications.
- Rugari, S., Sayda, M., & Kenned, A. (2013). A horse is a horse—and sometimes part of a clinical team, too. *American Nurse Today*, 8(9).
- Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage. <file:///C:/Users/Marybeth/Downloads/Saldana-2013-TheCodingManualforQualitativeResearchers2.pdf>
- Salmons, J. (2014). *Qualitative online interviews: Strategies, design, and skills*. Sage Publications.

- Saul, J. S. (2013). The power of the herd: Using equine-assisted psychotherapy for at-risk and treatment-resistant patients. In *60th Annual Meeting*. AACAP.
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15401383.2015.1023916>
- Schultz, P. N., Remick-Barlow, G., & Robbins, L. (2007). Equine-assisted psychotherapy: A mental health promotion/intervention modality for children who have experienced intra-family violence. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, *15*(3), 265-271.
- Schwartz, R.C. (1995). *Internal family systems*. Guilford.
- Seidman, I. (2019). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340539936_Employing_Use_of_Self_for_Transparency_Rigor_Trustworthiness_and_Credibility_in_Qualitative_Organizational_Research_Methods
- Sheade, H. E. (2020). *Equine-assisted Counseling and Psychotherapy: Healing Through Horses*. Routledge.
- Shedler, J. (2010). The efficacy of psychodynamic psychotherapy. *American Psychologist*, *65*(2), 98.
- Shufutinsky, A. (2020). Employing use of self for transparency, rigor, trustworthiness, and credibility in qualitative organizational research methods. *Organization Development Review*, *52*(1), 50–58

- Shultz, B. N. (2005). The effects of equine-assisted psychotherapy on the psychosocial functioning of at-risk adolescents ages 12-18. <http://equisource.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/The-effects-of-Equine-Assisted-Psychotherapy-on-the-psychosocial-functioning-of-at-risk-adolescents-ages-12-18.pdf>
- Siporin, S. (2012). Talking horses: Equine psychotherapy and intersubjectivity. *Psychodynamic Practice*, 18(4), 457-464.
- Skidmore, J. T. (2018). *The Effects of Gestalt-Centered Equine Facilitated Therapy on Marital Satisfaction in Relationships in Which One Member Is a Combat Veteran Suffering with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University-Commerce).
- Smith, A. (1977). *Multimodal Behavior Therapy*. By Arnold A. Lazarus and Contributors. Springer. 1976. Pp xiv 232. Index 8pp. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 130(2), 196-196. Doi:10.1192/S000712500001196X
- Stake, R. E. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. Guilford Press.
- Steinmetz, H., Knappstein, M., Ajzen, I., Schmidt, P. & Kabst, R. (2016). How effective are behavior change interventions based on the theory of planned behavior? *ZeitschriftFürPsychologie*.
- Stock, K. L. & Kolb, D. A. (2016). Equine-assisted experiential learning. *OD Practitioner*, 48(2), 44. <https://learningfromexperience.com/downloads/research-library/equine-assisted-experiential-learning.pdf>

- Switzer, L. A. (2016). What are the benefits of EAGALA and PATH Intl. for TR?
http://encompass.eku.edu/swps_undergraduategallery/81/
- Thomas, S. L. (2017). Embodied conflict resolution: The use of body psychotherapy, gestalt equine psychotherapy, and aikido to resolve conflict amongst adolescents. *International Body Psychotherapy Journal*, 16(1).
- Thompson, F., Ketcham, C. J. & Hall, E. E. (2014). Hippotherapy in children with developmental delays: Physical function and psychological benefits. *Advances in Physical Education*, 2014.
- Thorne, S., Kirkham, S. R. & O'Flynn-Magee, K. (2004). The analytic challenge of interpretive description. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(1), 1–11.
- Toews, I., Glenton, C., Lewin, S., Berg, R. C., Noyes, J., Booth, A., Marusic, A., Malicki, M., Munthe-Kaas, H. & Meerpohl, J. (2016). Extent, awareness and perception of dissemination bias in qualitative research: An explorative survey. *PLoS ONE*, 11(8), 1–16.
<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0159290>
- Toye, F., Seers, K., Allcock, N., Briggs, M., Carr, E., Andrews, J., & Barker, K. (2013) 'Trying to pin down jelly'. Exploring intuitive processes in quality assessment for meta-ethnography. *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 13, 46.
 Doi:10.1186/1471-2288-13-46
- Trask, L. (2010). Helping with horses: Equine-assisted psychotherapy.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/wild-thoughts/201010/helping-horses-equine-assisted-psychotherapy-eap>

- Turner, D. (2021). Coding system design and management. *Analyzing and Interpreting Qualitative Research: After the Interview*, 117.
- Turner, M. (2018). Horses in therapy: The practice of equine-facilitated psychotherapy. https://digitalcommons.du.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1321&context=capstone_masters
- Tuuvas, M., Carlsson, J., & Norberg, J. (2017). A healing relationship: Clients' experiences of the long-term relational significance of the horse in horse assisted psychotherapy. *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counseling*, 19(3), 307-328.
- Van Der Kolk, B.A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.
- Vanover, C., Mihas, P., & Saldana, J. (Eds.). (2021). *Analyzing and Interpreting Qualitative Research: After the Interview*. SAGE Publications.
- Vincent, A., & Farkas, K. J. (2017). Application of attachment theory to equine-facilitated therapy. *Society Register*, 1(1), 7-22. [file:///C:/Users/Marybeth/Downloads/10417-20386-2-PB%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Marybeth/Downloads/10417-20386-2-PB%20(1).pdf)
- Walden University (2017). Research Ethics & Compliance: Welcome from the IRB. Institutional Review Board for Ethical Standards in Research. <https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/orec>
- Walsh, I., Holton, J. A., Bailyn, L., Fernandez, W., Levina, N. & Glaser, B. (2015). What grounded theory is... a critically reflective conversation among scholars. *Organizational Research Methods*, 1094428114565028.

- Wang, M. E. (2017). Equine-Assisted psychotherapy: An overview of the therapeutic use of the horse in mental health settings. <http://commons.lib.niu.edu/bitstream/handle/10843/17473/Wang.%20Equine-Assisted%20Psychotherapy.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage Publications. <http://www.madeira-edu.pt/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Fgm4GJWVTRs%3D&tabid=3004>
- Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. (6th ed.) Sage publications.
- Yorke, J., Adams, C., & Coady, N. (2008). Therapeutic value of equine-human bonding in recovery from trauma. *Anthrozoös*, 21(1), 17-30.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

ID number assigned to interviewee: _____

Date of interview: _____

Demographic information of the population served:

Age range: _____

Gender: _____

Presenting problems: _____

Guiding questions:

1. What is it that you try to accomplish in the therapeutic work you do?
2. How do you tend to understand the nature of your client's difficulties?
3. What do you consider when deciding on a particular form of therapy for client?
4. Are there certain kinds of behavior (concerns, problems) that you think you tend to pay more attention to?
5. Are there particular theorists whose work you find especially helpful in working with your client population?
6. Do you use any of this work with your clients and if so, how?
7. What are some indicators you use to determine if your clients are meeting treatment outcomes?

Closing question:

8. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy?