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Using Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) to Examine the Effects of Equine Assisted Activities on the Personal and Professional Development of Student Therapists

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Using Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) to Examine the Effects of Equine Assisted
Activities on the Personal and Professional Development of Student Therapists

by

Diana I. Giraldez Carter

A Dissertation Presented to the
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Nova Southeastern University

2015

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by

Diana I. Giraldez Carter

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This dissertation was submitted by Diana I. Giraldez Carter under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Program of Marriage and Family Therapy at Nova Southeastern University.

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Abstract

The Introduction to Equine Assisted Family Therapy course offered at Nova Southeastern University (NSU) provides Master's and Doctoral level student therapists the opportunity to learn how to conduct an equine session and how to utilize horses as part of the therapeutic process. Students learn about the underlying theories and framework behind the equine activities and methodology, as well as participate in the equine activities themselves. For the purpose of this study, classroom discussions centered around processing the students' experiences and were further enriched by viewing photographs and videos that had been taken of the students conducting the equine activities. The researcher utilized IPR as a qualitative methodology to create an improved perspective where students reflected on their experience and made connections with their professional and personal developments.

The findings of this grounded theory study document how students reflected on their personal and clinical development. More specifically, the transcripts of the conversations that took place during class discussions and interviews from students who took the course a year earlier showed that students reflected on their personal awareness, created changes in their relationships, developed their self of the therapist, honed in on their clinical skills and started viewing therapy differently. This study confirmed the transformative nature that the Introduction to Equine Assisted Therapy course has on the students.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The relationship between animals and humans, whether therapeutic or otherwise, has had a long history. Animals have been involved in human lives as pets, working partners and more recently, as partners in the therapeutic process (All, Loving, & Crane, 1999). Suthers-McCabe (2001) expands on the healing effect of pets when he states, “Pet ownership and attachment, like human social support, directly enhance health and well-being and also buffer the impact of stressful events” (p. 94). The positive effects that animals have provided to humans are now being put to use in therapeutic settings. In addition to the calming effect domestic animals can have, they can also provide a less threatening view of therapy, the therapeutic setting, and even the therapist (Trotter, 2012).

Animal and/or pet therapy has been described as “the use of an animal that is introduced into the immediate surroundings of an individual or group as a medium of interaction with a therapeutic purpose” (All et al., 1999, p. 50). Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) is goal-oriented and animals are used in order to reach that particular goal, becoming part of the “treatment process” (Pichot & Coulter, 2006, p. 19). Research indicates that the presence of an animal can decrease the “assumed boundaries between people” (Pichot & Coulter, 2006, p. 19) and that people are more apt to start conversations between strangers, regardless of gender or setting when an animal is present. Introducing animals into therapeutic settings can encourage conversation, help to focus on the positive aspects in a narrative and provide a safer and more comfortable context for the client (Pichot & Coulter, 2006).

Several studies have found that the use of animals can affect the physiological and psychological health of humans. Edney (1995) found that being in the presence of dogs can “lower blood pressure of individuals experiencing moderate stress” and other changes such as “(a) the relaxant effect on hypertension; (b) the anxiety-relieving effect of watching ornamental fish in the elderly; and (c) the positive effects of the introduction of cats, dogs, and rabbits on residents in a nursing home” (All et al., 1999, p. 51). The effects of the use of animals in therapy with humans are infinite and range from physiological change to psychological differences within the healthcare system. Patients can grab and throw a ball in order to promote better mobility for physically rehabilitation, children can develop better reading habits by reading to an animal without fear of being judged for their mistakes, and stress and anxiety can be reduced in clients who are experiencing trauma (Pichot & Coulter, 2006).

Equine Assisted Therapy

Under the umbrella of animal assisted therapies, equine assisted therapy incorporates horses in the therapeutic process. This “complex blend of science and nature” has slowly been developing in the realm of psychotherapy as an additional modality or a “stand-alone” form of therapy (Pichot & Coulter, 2006). Unlike the aforementioned animals, horses are prey animals, which means that their main source of food is grass, not other animals. Therefore, horses have learned to pay attention to their surroundings in order to ensure their survival (Hill, 2006). Their reaction to whatever happens in their context is immediate and unfiltered. Horses do not change their tone of voice or choose their words carefully in order to spare the other’s feelings as humans do; they give a pure reaction because their survival depends on it (Masini, 2010). How a

horse responds to the way it is approached by anyone or anything around it is information. Accordingly, horses function as mirrors that reflect the actions of the human (Trotter, 2011). Equine therapy involves the client interacting with a horse, making the therapy an experiential approach where reactions between the horse and the client(s) are valued (Masini, 2010). Finally, equine therapy is not a model, but a perspective that involves a range of therapeutic ideas that are applied to a variety of populations (Masini, 2010).

Equine therapy consists of several branches from which sprout three main forms, one of which is the focus of this dissertation. The first is known as Hippotherapy, where the person, adult or child, rides the horse “for rehabilitation purposes” (All et al., 1999). The riding is found to “influence the rider’s posture, balance, and mobility” (All et al., 1999, p. 52). The rider strengthens his or her core, balance and physical mobility by trying to maintain stability in coordination with the horse’s movement (All et al., 1999; Brudvig, 1988; Fitzpatrick & Tebay, 1998; Frewin & Gardiner, 2005). The purpose of the therapy is to improve the physical movement of the patient. In this type of equine therapy, the physical, occupational or speech therapist and a professional horse handler accompany the client.

Similarly, therapeutic riding also can be used in cases with cognitive and physical disability with an emphasis on horsemanship skills. This type of therapy can also be used for emotional disabilities, where the client can learn to manage riding a horse and/or taking care of a horse. A licensed mental and/or health professional are not necessary for this type of intervention (All et al., 1999). Other intrapersonal aspects that benefit from therapeutic riding include “development of patience, emotional control and self-

discipline, sense of normality, and expansion of the locus of control” (All et al., 1999, p. 54). The inclusion of these aspects within the therapeutic riding can allow the rider to feel more like an able person if they are disabled (All et al., 1999, p. 54). Riders can also feel engaged as productive members of society as well as draw on new personal strengths, to “help clients build on positive attribute and reduce negative factors” (All et al., 1999, p. 54).

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) and Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) shift the focus from physical rehabilitation to psychological therapy. In both EAP and EAL, the work is done on the ground in the arena. Horsemanship skills are not taught or needed in order to be a part of the therapeutic process (Masini, 2010). The focus is to have the individual, family, couple or group complete an activity or task with the horse so that their obstacle becomes tangible and metaphorical, creating different opportunities for change (Jarrell, 2005). The work then becomes an experiential exercise for the clients. Masini (2010) states that this type of therapy is “not so much a theoretical orientation as it is an approach that can be used in conjunction with a variety of therapeutic modalities and with diverse client populations” (p. 30). Therapeutically, EAP often works from the frame of Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) (EAGALA, 2010) where strengths are highlighted, the perspective is systemic and brief, and the actions are oriented towards solutions (De Shazer, 1998, 1994). On the other hand, Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) focuses on team building and corporate training. Here the focus of the work is not clinical or therapeutic but rather concentrated on the strengths of how the group members work together, (EAGALA, 2010). The umbrella organization of both of these modalities, Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA), has developed a detailed

method of conducting the equine sessions. One of the main distinctions includes having a licensed mental health professional and an equine specialist always present for EAP sessions (although not necessarily for EAL sessions) (Trotter, 2011). The equine specialist is included to monitor the horse's behavior and look after the safety of the client(s), horses, and the therapist (EAGALA, 2010). This gathering becomes a therapeutic experience as the behavior of the horse and client are brought into the process, which includes what the client is observing, feeling, projecting, etc. Green (2013) summarizes this experiential therapy as follows:

It requires extemporaneous utilization by the therapist and invites metaphorically meaningful discoveries by the clients. Because horses are simultaneously physically imposing and exquisitely sensitive to non-verbal interpersonal cues, they provide an in-the-moment response to, and magnification of, the couples' relationship patterns. As the clients adapt to the spontaneous behavior of the horses, the horses adapt to shifts in the couple's attitudes and interactions, facilitating reflections, connections, and transformations. (p. 1)

As the clients are working on the equine activities, "talk therapy" takes a back seat and provides room for the clients to *show* the therapist what the problem is instead of *telling* them. Green (2013) adds "A single session with the horses offers clients an embodied experience of awareness and transformation that they may return to in future therapy sessions and also in their day-to-day interactions with each other" (p. 2).

Equine Course at Nova Southeastern University

The Equine Assisted Family therapy (EAFT) coursework developed at Nova Southeastern University (NSU) in Fort Lauderdale, Florida by Shelley Green, Ph.D.,

LMFT, is focused on the use of equine therapy to help families, couples and individuals, and on utilizing the equine model to assist student therapists with their professional and clinical development. The EAFT course is a three-credit course where students have the opportunity to learn how to construct and process an equine session with clients. Class time alternates between a classroom environment and field work at a barn with horses. The students participate in equine activities with the horses where conversations about their clinical and personal development are processed through self-reflection. The course is offered in the Fall and Winter term due to weather considerations, with a maximum of twelve students in order to minimize the ratio between horses and students during equine related activities. An advanced EAFT class has been developed and began in the Winter 2015 term. The field EAFT sessions are conducted at Stable Place, Inc., a nonprofit organization that provides equine therapy sessions to the community.

Pilot Project

During the Winter 2014 term of the Equine Assisted Family Therapy course at NSU, students were learning how to conduct an equine session by performing some of the activities and tasks themselves. As part of their process, students signed a media release that allowed their photographs and video to be taken during the equine activities. These photographs were posted on the social media page for Stable Place. After three visits to the barn, a decision was made by the researcher to develop a power point slide show with the photographs of the activities so that the students could observe themselves one week after the activity and comment on what they noticed. The students were asked to let the person who was featured in each image speak first regarding their interpretation of what they saw, and then share their thoughts and feelings with the class. Each student

was shown one or more photographs of himself or herself to process within the group. The students talked about what they noticed and later wrote about it on NSU's online discussion forum for the class.

The positive feedback and reflections that continued after course hours were overwhelming. Comments included statements such as, "The feedback I received from each student challenged my self-perceptions and gave me new ways to look at myself. You made me question some of the certainties I hold about myself, and I am so appreciative to have had this opportunity." Another student added, "I felt as if I was able to recall more information or attach a different understanding to the experience. Almost as if I had been processing that moment over the course of the week and again during class." (EAFT student, personal communication, 2014).

The point of the activity was for the students to process their experience of the previous week's equine activities. The responses from the students indicated the activity met the researchers objective. "The photographs were a wake-up call for someone like me who doesn't get a lot of time for reflection, nor a lot of feedback as to what people really see. After seeing those photographs, I can almost promise what people that don't really know me see is not the same thing as those that really do know me say about me." Unexpectedly, the students continued to reflect on what they saw and heard about themselves in the still photographs and began applying it to their academic and clinical life outside of the class: (EAFT student, personal communication, 2014)

Diana's photograph of me psychologically contorted with the tensions of trying to make several things happen at once has really stayed with me, and strongly influenced my practicum sessions last week. Seeing the effort involved in my

posture helped me to characterize my clinical style in a way that gave me permission to let go of some of the responsibility for the sessions. I think this made me a lot more available to being in the moment with my client, (EAFT student, personal communication, 2014).

Besides showing the photographs on the power point presentation, the researcher also added a thought-provoking quote in order to focus the students on the reflection process. The inclusion of the quote seemed to have an additional impact on the reflection process for the students, “Even the quote at the beginning provided a context that influenced how I heard what was said. This was a beautifully designed and facilitated activity” (EAFT student, personal communication, 2014).

The process overall was well received by the students and this became the way the class began to process the equine activities. Based on the positive feedback received, the researcher considered expanding and including this form of processing to future EAFT courses in order to study the effects it has on the clinical and personal development of the students.

Objective

The interest of the researcher for this study was to see if the activities and the processing of the equine activities were affecting the personal and clinical development of the students and in what manner. In order to use a qualitative form of processing, the researcher used Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) to gather data from the participants. IPR is the process by which the students observe themselves doing clinical work and then reflect on being in that moment in order to gain insight regarding what they did, could do more of and/or improve on (Chenail, 2011; Crews et al., 2005; Hess, 2011). Crews et al.

(2005) stated it best: “IPR training focuses on complex, higher levels of understanding gained through personal analysis, relationship building, and accommodation to client needs” (p. 83). The observation that the students, therapists in training or clinicians do is mainly through video; however, for the purposes of this study and based on the feedback received from the pilot project, the students were shown still photographs as well as video of themselves throughout the assigned equine activities. The students commented and reflected on the photographs of them doing the equine activities through IPR. Questions of interest to the researcher were: Did the students view their role as therapists differently? Did the students expand on their ideas regarding the self of the therapist? Were the equine activities transforming the students experience in the class? Who else noticed the changes, if any? These questions were assessed using process research qualitative analysis gathered from the comments and verbal reflections of the students. The conversations were transcribed and an analysis of the answers was performed.

When doing therapeutic work with the horses there was value in making observations and offering questions. Information can be lost if questions are made based on goals and observation is disregarded. “So rather than focusing on *the* story, we concentrate on inquiring” (Walter & Peller, 2000, p. 41). Observations helped keep the line of question in the here and now. Importance was given to the meaning that the students gave their experience with the equine activities, rather than the completion of such activities. What the students took away from the activities were their own ideas and meaning given to the activities, which, “may translate into immediate changes in their relationships” (Green, 2012, p. 3). In addition to this dissertation offering insight on the

effects of the equine activities on the students, the author also hoped to add to the limited research regarding equine and animal assisted therapy.

Personal Context of the Dissertation – Self of the Researcher

In order to give the reader some context regarding the author of this dissertation, I must confess that I was not always a fan of horses. I based my motivation to register for the EAFT class on this quote “We are always moving toward what is *not yet known*” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 44). I registered for the Equine Assisted Family Therapy class mainly because I wanted to get over my fear of horses. This was the first time that the course was being offered at our university, and at any Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) accredited Family Therapy program in the United States. My height is five feet and three quarters of an inch tall, therefore, horses seemed like gigantic creatures that could easily knock me over with any sudden movement. However, as a therapist in training I had come to know that that change is possible and had some ideas about how useful and creative therapy could be when animals were included. I also wanted to learn something new and rationalized that if I overcame a fear in the process...it would be a double bonus! I wanted to experience this type of therapy first-hand because I saw it as a potential referral for my present and future clients and thought it best to know what I would be getting my clients into. At the end of the 14-week course I had gotten over my fear of horses, I could lead a horse wherever I wanted and felt empowered each time I did. I had experienced the transformative nature of this work. After that term, I became the Teaching Assistant (TA) for the following five classes over the next three years. At the time of this writing, I am one of the therapists at Stable Place, Inc. and I conduct Equine Assisted Family

Therapy with all types of clients, ranging from SWAT and Substance abuse groups to couples, individuals and families.

Audience

Since this is a study for the Department of Marriage and Family Therapy under the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Nova Southeastern University, the general audience was the faculty and students of this field. Specifically, this study may be of interest to the students who have already taken or will be taking the Introductory or Advanced Equine Assisted Therapy class. More specifically, supervisors and therapists in training may be interested in this type of activity recall because of the different alternatives it can offer therapists in their reflection process.

Besides the potential referral that therapists can provide as a resource for their clients, therapists who wish to practice this type of therapy can offer self-supervision and examination of the therapist in their clinical work. That is, therapists can observe how they relate to clients, what they bring to the therapy room and their relationship with change. Questions that may be asked include: Do the students notice a difference between what they thought happened during the equine activity and what was shown in the photographs and/or video? Whatever is it that they noticed; did it change how they view themselves and their professional identity? What do the students take away from seeing themselves perform the equine activities? Future and present therapists can learn about this type of therapy in hopes to expand solution options for their clients as well as encourage their clients to experience this context-changing modality. It is important to note that this type of work does not only apply to marriage and family therapists but to professionals across all mental health fields. Finally, through the expansion of this

process, the researcher hoped that this study would add to the limited research of animal, pet and/or equine assisted therapy, and the therapeutic benefits to fellow humans.

Organization of the Study

This study is composed of five chapters. The first chapter shows the context for the area of study and outlines the objective, pilot study, purpose and audience of this dissertation. In the second chapter, the reader reviews the relevant research regarding animal and equine assisted therapy as well as a more profound outlook on the area of study. In the third chapter, the reader understands the methodology utilized in this study, in addition to the participants, methods, materials and how the data was analyzed. In the fourth chapter, the reader explores the analysis of the results and discusses the researcher findings. The fifth and last chapter expands on the implications of the study, limitations of the research and the directions for future research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Animal Assisted Therapies

Animals have been a part of humans' lives for centuries, whether the relationship was for companionship, protection, work and more recently, therapy. Unlike human-to-human relationships, animals offer an unconditional, unfiltered and caring regard that is unmatched by any other in our species (Chandler, 2005; Pichot & Coulter, 2006; Trotter, 2011). Pichot and Coulter (2006) describe this type of relationship as one of "accepting without judgment; they don't condition their love and affection, and they are able to quickly forgive injustice" (p. 12). In recent years, there has been additional research documenting the benefits received by humans who are in relationship with an animal. These benefits include physical, emotional and mental healing (Chandler, 2005; Pichot & Coulter, 2006; Trotter, 2011, Green, 2013). This is why Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) has become a part of different therapeutic settings in order to facilitate the therapeutic process with patients and clients so that they can reach their individual goals (Draper et al., 1990; Kruger & Serpell, 2006).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, animals are often used by physical and occupational therapists in order to improve the gross and fine motor skills of patients (Trotter, 2012). These activities can include walking the dog using a leash, throwing the ball, as well as stimulation of the senses through the physical contact and petting of the animal (Fine, 2000; Trotter, 2012). Internal physical changes also take place in people who interact positively with animals. Parshall (2003) reported a study that tracked ninety-two outpatients from a cardiac unit and found that those who had pets lived longer than those who did not. The study also indicated that caring for a pet reduced the level of stress in

the patients. Additionally, blood pressure and chemical changes in the body due to stress are also decreased and stabilized when a person comes in contact with an animal (Odendaal, 2000; Serpell, 2000; Trotter, 2012). Moreover, the animals had the same physical changes (Odendaal, 2000). These physical benefits translate over to the emotional health of humans, creating change in their relationships and ways in which stress is handled (Chandler, 2005; Serpell, 2000; Trotter, 2012).

The presence of animals can help reduce stress, create and enhance self-awareness, allow individuals to learn about how their actions affect their surroundings, and increase a sense of responsibility (Pichot & Coulter, 2006; Serpell, 2000; Trotter, 2012). Couples can learn and prepare for parenthood, such as waking up early and planning schedules around walking and feeding times (Trotter, 2012). Caring for animals also introduces children to an engaging social environment where interaction with others almost always occurs and buffers stress stemming from social support (Chandler, 2005; Serpell, 2000). Serpell (2000) explains this by stating that giving children animals of any kind is a “means of encouraging them to develop tender feelings and a sense of responsibility for others” (p. 12). Other areas of emotional support also include motivation, self-control, reduced anxiety and acceptance that are not dependent on “appearance, social or economic status” (Trotter, 2012, p. 6). The numerous benefits that animals give humans have now cross-pollinated into the mental health field.

The presence of animals during a therapy session can ease the stress or anxiety that can be associated with a first-time visit to a therapist, catalyze conversation, and help clients open up about traumatic and/or difficult topics to talk about (Chandler, 2005; Fine, 2000; Trotter, 2012). The benefit of AAT is that it is not so much of a model as it is

an additional intervention. As such, AAT can be included into any theoretical model or style of therapy that the therapist already practices (Chandler, 2005). AAT can also be a part of individual and group therapeutic settings, as well as with children, adolescents and adults with “varying abilities” from a directive or nondirective standpoint (Trotter, 2012, pp. 6-7).

In order to transport the animals to facilities such as Assisted Living Facilities (ALF), rehabilitation centers, schools, and hospitals, the size of the animals are often taken into account (All, Loving, & Crane, 1999). Therapy dogs are becoming more common, as it is easier to transport a dog as opposed to a larger animal. While acknowledging the impact of this research, it is important to note that not all clients or patients may benefit from working with animals. Reasons may include allergies to certain fur types, limiting exposure of low immune defense patients to animals such as in hospice or hospital settings, and also the potential for the animal to hurt (bite and/or scratch) the client or patient (Parshall, 2000). Furthermore, past traumatic or negative contact with animals can become a factor and deter from the therapy (Parshall, 2000). Kogan et al. (1999) also adds that AAT should not be used exclusively to the extent that other modalities, treatments and interventions are ignored but rather as a supplemental approach. Equine assisted therapy can also be one of the AAT methodologies because of the difference that horses behaviors bring to therapy.

Equine Assisted Therapy

Unlike dogs, dolphins, and other animals used in therapy, horses are significantly bigger, heavier and have a certain characteristics that these animals don't, including their evolutionary position as prey animals (Frewin & Gardiner, 2005; Hill, 2006). Horses

only eat grass and primarily graze and are the main meal for other animals such as mountain lions, bears, and even humans. Years of survival have taught the horses to survive by “being wary of predators” (Hill, 2006, p. 6). This allows for horses to have a unique characteristic—they are particularly aware of their surroundings because their survival depends on it (Frewin & Gardiner, 2005; Hill, 2006). Therefore, when horses respond to outside stimulation from the environment or humans, they respond in a pure way because their survival is in the forefront. Kohanov (2001) states “Even the most secure horse knows that any two-legged creature conveying the gestures of one emotion in order to hide another is either up to no good or delusional enough to be a danger to self and others” (p. 106).

Like most other animals, “Horses are not judgmental; they don't have expectations or prejudices. They don't care what you look like; are not influence by your station in life; are blissfully unaware of whether you have friends or not” (Frewin & Gardiner, 2005, p. 5). Trotter (2012) encourages the use of animals in sessions because they can be “much more effective at confronting behaviors and attitudes than people are, partly because of their honesty but also because of their ability to observe and respond to nonverbal communication” (p. 9). Animals cannot filter what they communicate, use a different tone of voice or edit their words so that their message can be less hurtful or understood better. The way they communicate is unfiltered and immediate. Green (2013) expands on this by stating:

Without anthropomorphizing, it remains clear through observing horse-human interaction that horses have a unique capacity to attune themselves quickly to the non-verbal communication of humans, to determine whether the intentions

conveyed by that communication allow for a safe environment for the horse, and to respond accordingly and immediately. They read human behavior quickly, and are intuitive and responsive to that behavior. (p. 3)

For clients experiencing moments like this, verbal communication is suspended and observation is highlighted. They are forced to pay attention to what is happening to their non-verbal communication and make sense of it through metaphors and observations. Furthermore, clients are given feedback by the horses regarding their behaviors and actions.

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy Theories

Approaches to equine assisted psychotherapy have primarily been informed by four major counseling theories: Brief therapy, Gestalt therapy, Reality therapy and Adlerian therapy (Trotter, 2012). The brief therapy aspect is as follows "...two basic philosophies of change: (1) the focus on visible behavioral interactions; and (2) the use of purposeful interventions to change the visible pattern of undesirable behavior" (Trotter, 2012, p. 10). As the client(s) works with the horses, they may attempt to do several things to make the horse complete the task with them. In doing so, the horse may not respond and the client can be forced to change certain patterns of behavior and actions. This can be used as a metaphor and parallel to how they are dealing with the problem in their life.

The second theory is the Gestalt theory that involves experiencing the here and now. In equine therapy, the client is working with the horse and questions are posed as the client is working (Trotter, 2012). If the client expresses frustration or stress, for example, the therapist addresses it immediately with the client. The observation

presented by the therapist to the client is immediate. Therefore, the client is able to reflect immediately on what they are doing, and then act differently.

The third theory is that of reality therapy where “the therapist is an active participant in the counseling process, and both have an education-oriented focus. Glasser’s focus on the central importance of love and belonging needs is facilitated through the relationship clients establish with the horse during therapy” (Trotter, 2012, p. 11). By having the client socialize with the horse and having the therapist present to encourage thought processes around love and belonging, the client can begin to feel that they belong to something. The horse in turn responds to the client, validating those feelings.

The fourth theory that has influenced equine theory is the work of Alfred Adler. The theory states that people strive to be significant in their context and relationships (Trotter, 2012). When working with a horse (a large, heavy animal) the client may feel intimidated or fearful. However, if the client causes the horse to follow a particular order or complete a task, then the client may feel a sense of accomplishment and significance. The imposing figure of the horse plays a role in validating the actions of the clients. Being able to lead a horse or have them do something can be empowering for the client, who may embrace the metaphor that if they can deal with the horse, they can deal with their problem.

EAGALA Approach

The Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) dictates a specific way of conducting the equine assisted process, depending on what the client needs. “The EAGALA Model of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy and Learning requires a

co-facilitating team that must include an EAGALA-certified mental health professional and an EAGALA-certified equine specialist in all sessions” (Trotter, 2012, p. 5). These two professionals are always included in a session and work collaboratively to provide safety and perspective in the sessions, while continuing to reflect on the client’s needs. Also, unlike therapeutic riding and hippotherapy, “EAGALA also specifies that all session activity must be performed with the client remaining on the ground and never mounting the horse” (Trotter, 2012, p. 5). This provides a safer context for the participants and also relaxes the clients so that they do not assume they need to have any horsemanship skills. The focus of the activities is not clinical or based on learning horsemanship skills (EAGALA, 2010). “It is not necessary for clients to possess horsemanship skills or any specific knowledge on horses—they don’t even have to like horses” (Jarrell, 2005, p. 41). The two forms of equine therapy discussed in this study do not involve riding a horse, taking care of a horse or training a horse. Rather, they involve using the horse as a metaphor and tool, so that the equine assisted work can unfold.

Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) focuses on corporate training and team building, the purpose of which is not to do therapy but rather to create teamwork where participants focus on communication and working together in order to accomplish a task (EAGALA, 2010). The focus of EAL is on “learning and educational goals” (EAGALA, 2010). Some of the goals that the individuals or groups can be “improved product sales for a company, leadership skills for a school group, or resiliency training for our military warriors” (EAGALA, 2010).

Equine assisted psychotherapy (EAP) “incorporates horses experientially for emotional growth and learning” (EAGALA, 2010). This brief, therapeutic approach to

couples, families, individuals, and groups, works on the premise that participants “learn about themselves and others by participating in activities with the horses, and then processing (or discussing) feelings, behaviors, and patterns” (EAGALA, 2010). The focus of this modality takes into account mental and emotional health and the focus is clinical and therapeutic. Like EAL, EAP is not about horsemanship or riding skills, it is solely focused on ground work where the participants can learn about “non-verbal communication, assertiveness, creative thinking and problem-solving, leadership, work, taking responsibility, teamwork and relationships, confidence, and attitude” (EAGALA, 2010). Mood disorders, addiction, post-traumatic stress disorder, behavioral problems, eating disorders, depression, anxiety and relationship problems are just a few of the topics that are addressed using EAP through a variety of equine activities (EAGALA, 2010; Jarrell, 2005; Masini, 2010; Trotter, 2012). The equine activities used in EAL and in EAP are the same but what differ are the focus and the processing of such activities.

There are special roles that each member of the therapeutic team plays and each contribute into making the equine assisted therapy different from all other therapeutic modalities. The role of the therapist is to observe and ask questions as the client works with the horse. The tasks that the therapist gives the client can be directive but vague (Green, 2012). This can often change the way a traditional therapist would behave in a session because it requires flexibility and improvisation in terms of the weather and whether or not the equine activity will be completed or not. Jarrell (2005) states this from a personal standpoint by writing “As an equine therapist, I have learned that it is generally more effective not to have a specific plan when I begin my sessions with clients and horses” (p. 41). For example, the therapist may ask a couple to build an obstacle

course that represents what they are struggling with in their relationship. The therapist offers the couples tools such as balls, cones, hoops, pool noodles, and barrels, which they can use to create an obstacle course. The therapist may then ask the couple to explain what each part of the obstacle represents and have the horse go through it. The therapist then observes the couple as they work. An equine therapist does not have an agenda or reason for why there is a problem, but explores this through questions and curiosity with the client. “The horse will engage in a behavior that results in bringing up a client’s issues. It is then that the task of the therapist to invite the client to explore these metaphors” (Jarrell, 2005, p. 42).

The clients are not given instructions on how well they are doing or if they are doing something wrong. “I always tell my participants that they can’t do anything wrong in my sessions; how they show up with the horse is how they show up in the world” (Jarrell, 2005, p. 42). The way that the clients act or approach the horses is generally how they act and approach the problems in their life. Therefore, observations and questions are important because they bring awareness to that area. “I explain to them that what they do here is what they do in the world, and if they would like to change we can practice that” (Jarrell, 2005, p. 42). Therefore, the therapist’s role is to give enough information for the client to do a task but vague enough to leave room for client interpretation.

The therapist does not always give the client the same task, but may ask the client to ground-tie the horse, move the horse from one end of the corral to the other, or simply observe two horses and talk about what they observe. The point of the exercise the therapist chooses is to “incorporate exercises with the horse and the client to target

behavior and underlying emotions” (Jarrell, 2005, p. 41). When working with a family or a couple, the members often have to work with each other and communicate with each other in order to accomplish a task or equine activity. “When EAP involves more than one person, as in couples, family, or group psychotherapy, participants interact not only with the horse but also with each other” (Masini, 2010, p. 32).

This approach to therapy is more physical and “hands on” than traditional talk therapy. If the problem between the family members is communication, the therapist may have the members accomplish a task together and then do another task where verbal communication is prohibited. “Through activities that require cooperation, and problem-solving skills, clients often realize the need to think ‘outside the box’ and find new ways of relating to each other” (Masini, 2010, p. 32). This can create new ways for the family members to communicate with each other and relate to each other. Also, by completing the tasks, the members or individuals immediately see how a difference in relating can create a difference in the task and completing the work with the horses. “Sometimes simply asking a client to walk a horse will reveal that person’s pattern of behavior in relationships” (Jarrell, 2005, p. 42).

As stated previously, not all the tasks involve working with the horse, some of them can involve simply observing a herd of horses. “Sometimes, I will begin sessions by asking my group to simply observe our herd of 16 horses and provide feedback on what they notice. It is very revealing to hear the interpretations, as they usually involve projection” (Jarrell, 2005, p. 42). Like a Rorschach painting, the clients often attribute human-like characteristics to the behavior of the horses that reflect much to how they behave. “If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely

metaphorical, then the way we think, what we perceive, and what we do every day is much a matter of metaphor” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 3). This projection is useful because it brings upon conversations and points of view about how the problem is affecting the person or the members of the family. “In individual therapy, the basic format consists of experiential activities involving the horse followed by the discussions with therapist about what the client experienced” (Masini, 2010, p. 31). Through these discussions, “An alteration of the performance of the complaint changes the patterns around it and often the complaint (either gradually or abruptly) disappears” (Cade & O’Hanlon, 1993, p. 127). The equine specialist also provides a different context for these patterns to take place by noticing and voicing the horse(s)’ behavior.

The role of the equine specialist is equally as important although less clinical. The equine specialist collaborates in the equine session by paying attention to the safety of the participants, the equine specialist, and the horse. Before every equine session, the client(s) are given a “safety talk” which includes what to do and what not to do when working with horses. This is not about doing something right or wrong, but rather safety instructions such as: not to stand behind the horse, to be mindful of their feet in relation to the horse’s hoofs in case they get stepped on and standing still if the horses start running. The equine specialist is also an expert on horse behavior so the observations they make are helpful towards the therapeutic session. These behaviors can include the way the horse moves its ears, noticing when the horse is relaxed or on alert, a horse’s personality in relation to other horses, etc. “If you know a horse, and he is a good horse, but all of a sudden does something out of character, there probably is a concrete explanation for his behavior. Give him the benefit of the doubt” (Hill, 2006, p. 16).

What the equine specialist brings to the therapy session is indispensable and provides a different context towards the equine assisted therapy sessions.

The last and most distinguishable member of the therapeutic team is the horse. The beauty of equine assisted family therapy work is that horses are allowed to be horses and their natural, untrained behavior is what makes the work unique. People are often afraid of horses; however, once they begin to interact with them and realize that they are prey animals, the attitude towards them changes (Trotter, 2011). At times, how the horse responds or behaves becomes a personification of the presenting problem where the client(s) have the opportunity to interact with this projection. The horse “provides a vehicle for the projection of the client’s unconscious worries or fears (Trotter, 2011, p. 9). “Horses provide metaphors for patients because horses respond to us in ways that patients would like to but are too polite or well socialized to do” (Trotter, 2011, p. 151). Much of the work and equine activities that the client(s) are presented with are transformed into metaphors that offers the clients a different way of viewing their presenting problem. “A metaphor can be a powerful tool for integrating diverse ideas and coordinating people’s actions” (Gergen, 2009, p. 150). Apart from the horses becoming a metaphor, the environment in which the equine therapy is conducted can also be a symbol.

Since the equine therapy is conducted outdoors, in a barn, corral or ring, the weather and nature take on a symbolism of its own. “Nature provides a special place for the human adventure of body, mind, and spirit- it provides an opportunity for mindful ways of being, for reflection, for peace” (Trotter 2011, p. 13). The natural surroundings and context of the therapy can be utilized during the session to highlight the client’s motivation and/or difficulty. For example, if it is very hot outside, and the client(s) are

getting uncomfortable and sweaty yet still trying to accomplish the task at hand, the therapist can point out the perseverance and patience of the client(s) as an asset. The ability for the client(s) to notice their strengths during trying times can introduce an exception to their negative thinking. Freedman & Combs (1996) & Michael White (1991) would view this as a “sparkling events’ (White, 1991) that contradict problem-saturated narratives” (p. 77). This brief, contextual and strength-based focus, applied to EAP by the use of a licensed mental health therapist as well as a licensed equine specialist, combines to form a new way of using horses to psychotherapeutic purposes – Equine Assisted Family Therapy (EAFT).

Equine Assisted Family Therapy

Equine assisted family therapy as taught at Nova Southeastern University follows the same requirements of EAGALA in utilizing a team approach composed of an equine specialist and a mental health therapist, with the important addition of specific brief, systemic family theories. ,Therapy is approached from a non-normative, non-pathologizing point of view where clients are assumed to be doing the best they can with this new experience (Green, 2013). Whether the client(s) take on a single session of equine therapy or participate in several sessions, they often experience “a transformation of the premises, meanings, and assumptions that have defined their relationship—transformations we understand as second-order change” (Green, 2013, p. 4). Green (2013) expands on this by stating:

Clients are assumed to be the experts on their own lives, and a non-normative, non-pathologizing stance is maintained; thus, we don’t assume that clients’ ‘hidden agendas’ or pathologies will reveal themselves through their work with

the horses. Rather, we believe the session will provide an opportunity for clients to try something new and to experience success in the moment; this experiential process can then offer new meanings for the behaviors that have been troubling to them. (p. 4)

These transformations and new meanings are created through the experience with various equine activities the client(s) and students perform. In this way, clients and students are given a “unique and unpredictable interaction with the horses” so that we can suggest “a way out of those habits into a less constrained and less troubling relationship” (Green, 2013, p. 4). These suggestions are pointed out in the form of questions by what is observable between the student or client and the horse during the equine activities.

As stated by Green (2012) “activities are designed to allow the clients to experience metaphorically something they may be struggling with outside the arena (p. 2).” Jarrell (2005) talks about moments like this when she states, “I continued to be awed when I repeatedly observe the horse respond to a client in a way that specifically targets her issue that yearns for healing” (p.42). During this time questions may be asked, such as, “Whom does the person helping you represent? Does this person remind you of anyone in your life? What about the second horse that followed? Who does that horse remind you of? Who would you wish it reminded you of?”. These questions serve to open the narrative and bring out exceptions in the client’s life. From the client’s lens, many highlighted moments are worth noting, such as the therapist’s ability to follow the client’s dialogue and give the client space and time to work with the horse. Gergen (2009) suggests that emotions can be perceived through how we project ourselves, “Expressions of love, anger, hope, desire, and so on, are typically embedded within full-

blown performances—including gestures, gaze, and posture” (Gergen, 2009, p. 99).

Clients are constantly communicating, verbally and nonverbally, and EAFT shows the students the worth of paying attention to that so that the conversation can focus on the process of the client, making it a fruitful conversation.

In the EAFT course, students learn to create, set up and run an equine session. In order to do so, the students perform several of the equine activities that would be asked of clinical clients. All the equine activities are done on the ground, following the same premise of EAGALA. Hamilton (2011) expands on the point of groundwork and human communication by stating:

One of the best ways for humans to dramatically enhance their awareness of energetic, non-verbal communication is to practice ground work with horses.

Body language is vital to human communication, but it is a woefully neglected and understudied aspect of communication, outside of advertising, legal, and entertainment industries. (p. 39)

Having to do the work on the ground takes non-verbal communication to a different level forcing the students to act rather than talk. The tasks do not have a “right way” to be accomplished nor are they presented in a specific order. There isn’t an agenda for the manner in which the students accomplish the task. Students are asked to do the same equine activities that would be presented to a client in order for them to experience the exercise and explore their personal and clinical developmental process. Students are asked to observe the horses and their herd dynamic in order to create a narrative and observe assumptions that they may have about each horse. The students are also asked to create an obstacle course, halter and take a horse for a walk, groom the

horse, and clean the hoof of the horse. Each activity has a theme to which it relates such as facing obstacles, how to communicate and show confidence, and how to establish relationships and build trust, respectively. There isn't a progressive nature to the activities but rather each one has its own particular area of emphasis. Green (2013) states, "The possibilities for tasks are endless, and are guided by the collaboration between the clinician and the equine specialist, balancing safety with risk, and offering opportunities for clients to be challenged personally and relationally" (p. 5). The equine activities are "simply jumping off points for observing client behaviors and interactions" (Green, 2013, p. 5). The focus is not on the completion of the equine activities, but rather it is the beginning of the observation process.

As the students perform these activities, the equine specialist and equine professor ask questions based on what they are observing. The questions are not from a stance of "pre-understanding" or getting the students to see something particular, but rather offer a different perspective to how they are performing the activity (Andersen, 1991; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Weingarten, 1992). Therefore, instead of seeing if the task was completed, attention is placed on observing the process of how it was approached. Green (2013) describes this by explaining that the therapists:

Do not interpret equine behavior for our clients; rather, we ask them what sense the behavior makes to them, and they often share compelling stories that are relevant and close to their own experiences. In this way, the experiential potential of equine assisted work is maximized. (p. 5)

The meaning and metaphor that the students assign to what the equine activities represent to them is what matters most. "These clinical observations then inform the

processing of the session” (Green, 2012). Most of the responses that the students make are based on their personal development, development as a student-therapist and what they introduce of themselves towards relationships and clinical sessions. Most of the conversations have also revolved around their development of the self of the therapist. “The concepts that govern our thoughts are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 3). The students maintain a weekly journal and continually reflect on their experience with the horses and equine activities.

Photography

For this study, the researcher shot photographs of the students in the moments before, during and after the equine activities took place. The photograph itself is an encapsulated moment in time, where what is embalmed is the expression and still action of the horse and the student(s). As stated by Hostetler, the photograph catches an interruption in the moment but does not halt the movement taking place with the student(s) and the horse (2004). Additionally, Susan Sontag (2010) adds to this concept by stating:

Photographs are perhaps the most mysterious of all the objects that make up, and thicken, the environment we recognize as modern. Photographs really are experience captured, and the camera is the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood. Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire.

Because IPR asked for photographs to be taken for the reflection process to be completed, I took the photographs myself. My philosophy behind the method of taking photographs did not come from schooling or educated technique. I simply shot a photograph in motion and from different angles. Reflecting on the literature of photography, I best identify with the philosophy of Alfred Steiglitz. Hostetler (2004) summarized Steiglitz's view best:

His refusal to encapsulate her personality into a single image was consistent with several modernist ideas: the idea of the fragmented sense of self, brought about by the rapid pace of modern life; the idea that a personality, like the outside world, is constantly changing, and may be interrupted but not halted by the intervention of the camera; and, finally, the realization that truth in the modern world is relative and that photographs are as much an expression of the photographer's feelings for the subject as they are a reflection of the subject depicted.

The reflection by the students regarding what they saw in that still moment of time is what brought depth to the photograph. There was no truth or reality within the photograph, except for what the outsider interpreted from it. From the pilot project, students and the researcher noticed that videos did not have the same processing effect as did the photographs. One can only attribute this to photographs having more room for interpretation, rather than a video, which shows action and an end result. Furthermore, it was the interpretation and meaning that the students gave the photographs that served as data for this research.

In order to continue processing the equine activities, photographs were taken of the students performing the tasks and shown to them a week or so later. This allowed for

the students to recreate what they were thinking while doing the activities and also to observe their body language to see if it was congruent with what they were thinking or trying to communicate. This methodology of reflecting back to the students in the form of photographs to extend the reflection process is called Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR). Chenail (2011) summarizes this process in this way: “With the IPR approach the interviewer and/or the interviewee listen to the interview again and stop the recording whenever a new question, impression, or observation arises” (p. 259). This methodology will be explained more fully in the methodology section to follow.

Summary and Conclusions

The limited literature on equine assisted therapy demonstrates how much room exists for new inquiries. Animals create physiological and psychological changes in the humans who interact with them. Horses have the same affect, with the added feature of being hyperaware of their surroundings due to their position as prey animals, which are the main meal for predatory animals. The unfiltered and unedited response that horses display when humans interact with them, along with the person’s response to the horse, is what provides information for the equine therapy work. Whether the population is clinical clients, or students that are learning this technique, the work offers a new opportunity in viewing change. “As fear is mastered and skills increased, working with a horse can provide a great sense of accomplishment and confidence in the ability to handle situations outside of the barn” (Trotter, 2012, p. 203). The equine activities encourage the students and clients to view their presenting problems differently, and to stay in the present in order to accomplish a task. Because there is no one right way to complete the

tasks, emphasis is placed instead on how the person works through the activities. Green (2013) states:

We seek instead to learn from clients how they typically interact with each other, and with themselves when faced with uncertainty, ambiguity, fear, tension, and unusual expectations. All of these are common factors in any equine session; our ability to observe and comment therapeutically on how our clients manage these concerns provides the heart of our clinical work, as it offers the potential for creating relational freedom rather than constraint. (p. 5)

Apart from the clinical nature of this therapy, students who have taken the equine assisted family therapy class have also benefitted from the reflections on their equine activities. Many believe that the benefits have affected their clinical and personal development as therapists. In chapter three, the reader examines how this study addresses a new focus in the evaluation of this topic.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Equine assisted therapy is an experiential modality where meaning is placed on the significance that the students and clients attribute to the equine activities. “Equine assisted work thus offers an alternative context, apart from a content-based discussion of problem behaviors, that may allow clients to experience change and then apply that change back to their current life situations” (Green, 2013, p. 5). Each student can interpret his or her experience in the activities differently, regardless of the type of equine activity or whether they have participated in the activity before. Green (2013) expands on this by stating, “Each session is unique, unpredictable, and demanding in its requirement that we observe and utilize what’s happening in the moment, rather than hold onto any commitment about what ‘should’ be happening” (p. 12). Students can give different meanings to the activities as well as other areas of their life. In order to highlight and give insight to the meanings that each student attributed to their experience, the researcher used a qualitative research methodology. More specifically, in order to best address the significance of these meanings, grounded theory was used to analyze the data along with open coding of the code responses of the students under the Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) methodology.

The nature of this study required a qualitative methodology. “Using IPR, researchers are able to access clients’ unspoken in-session experiences as they are remembered to have occurred during the session. These are processes that are usually inaccessible via other data collection methods” (Larsen, Flesaker & Stege, 2008, p. 20). This chapter discusses the theoretical and philosophical framework of the choice of a

qualitative methodology. It also reviews the research design and procedure, the participants, the recruitment and initial contact, and the ethical considerations of the study. The hope of this researcher is that the methodology described above can initiate and invite more interest, as well as bring further insight into this innovative but relatively un-researched field.

Theoretical and Philosophical Framework: Qualitative Methods

Equine assisted therapy is an experiential modality that can be explained more thoroughly with words than numbers. Since each client, participant and student has a different experience of what occurred during the equine activities, qualitative methodology offers an individual view of what the participants express. Creswell (2013) explains this by stating, “When researchers conduct qualitative research, they are embracing the idea of multiple realities. Different researchers embrace different realities, as do the individuals being studied in the reader of a qualitative study” (p. 20). This study is intended to explore the different ways in which the equine activities influence the student’s personal and professional development. By doing this, the different realities captured in the different participant’s words helps to explore the same phenomenon from a range of perspectives. The qualitative framework helps the researcher record how “individuals participating in the study view their experiences differently” (Creswell, 2013, p. 20).

In order to address the “lack of knowledge regarding the specific factors and factor relationships” (Creswell, 2013, p. 350) that make up the process of the equine activities a grounded theory approach was used. According to Creswell (2013), the use of grounded theory is to “focus on a process or an *action* that has distinct steps or phrases

that occur over time. Thus, a grounded theory study has ‘movement’ or some action that the researcher is attempting to explain” (p. 85). In this case, the researcher wanted to understand what effect the equine course and therefore activities, had on the clinical and personal development of the participants during the time that they were enrolled in the course and one year later. In keeping with the grounded theory approach, the researcher developed a theory explaining the change. I also kept a journal where I recorded my process of taking photographs and thoughts about which photographs I chose to present to the students throughout the research. Creswell (2013) states:

Memoing becomes part of developing the theory as the researcher writes down ideas as data are collected and analyzed. In these memos, the ideas attempt to formulate the process that is being seen by the researcher and to sketch out the flow of the process. (p. 85)

For the purpose of this study, I focused on the aspect of how I took photographs. The specific qualitative methodology used to extract the different perspectives and clinical and professional development from the participants was Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR).

Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) has had several uses in the therapeutic field. Norman Kagan first used it in 1980 as a training model in which clinicians could pay attention to the therapist self-awareness in regards to the therapeutic relationship (Cashwell, 1994; Kagan, 1980). Hess (2011) summarizes the use by writing that

Kagan noticed that people can vividly recall their experiences as they watch themselves on a videotape. They can then process information that sensitizes

them to the nuances of the relationship, which allows for deeper processing and assessment. (p. 71).

When IPR was first used, the interviews took place within 48 hours of the recorded activity (Larsen et al., 2008). This was done because the researchers believed that “The closer the recall is to the original conversation, the more vividly and easily activated the memories are expected to be” (Larsen et al., 2008, p. 21). For the purposes of this study, the participants engaged in IPR within one week after the experience has taken place.

Later, IPR was used to help students watch experienced therapists use specific and intentional therapeutic techniques so that students could learn to apply them (Crews et al., 2005; Kagan 1976, 1980). The expert therapists then talked about what they were experiencing, thinking, and feeling while they were doing the counseling and in turn, the students also commented on their own thoughts and emotions as they watched (Baker et al., 1990; Crews et al., 2005). The point of this exercise was for the students to observe the skills and techniques that were applied and look at what was being done from the clients’ perspective (Crews et al., 2005; Kagan, 1976, 1980). “Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) is an approach that has been used in the training and continuing professional education of psychotherapists to facilitate reflective practice” (Gale, Pasalodos-Sanchez, Kerzin-Storror, Hall, & MacLeod, 2010, p. 56).

As well as helping the therapists to observe therapeutic skills, IPR also became a technique used with clients so that they could observe their actions and body language (Elliot, 1986; Frankel, 2007; Gale et al., 2010; Gottman & Levenson, 1985; Larsen et al., 2008). “The goal of IPR was to obtain accurate information about the clients’

experiences within their psychotherapy session” (Frankel, 2007, p. 22). IPR methodology has the intention of helping clients and therapists to gain insight by “stimulating the recollection of the clients’ experiences during the phenomenon of interest” (Elliot, 1986). These recollections don't deviate from what took place previously but rather add to the memory, as it has been documented that the “experiences and descriptions highly correlated with those experienced in-session” (Gottman & Levenson, 1985). Larsen et al. (2008) states that IPR helps to encourage the interviewee to slow down the thought process and analyze their experience, as described here:

In one moment of therapy a client might be thinking several different thoughts, attending to the therapist, and formulating his or her next statement. Allowing clients to take their time during the IPR interview gives them space to sort out these thoughts and articulate their experience. (p. 21)

These recollections take place while the individuals are observing recorded video or photographs of the activity that was performed. “As a process-focused interview method IPR allows researchers to obtain firsthand insights into professional interactions through observation” (Larsen et al., 2008, p. 19). McLeod (2001) describes IPR-based research as “a jewel in the crown of qualitative psychotherapy research” (p. 81). The researcher believes that this qualitative methodology was the best method to use under the considerations of this study because it highlights the different perspectives of the participants as well as includes their reflections of when the equine activities are recalled.

Research Design and Procedure

For this study, the focus of gathering and analyzing data was qualitative. That is, emphasis was placed on how the students made sense of what they were seeing and what

their experience had been. Also, the responses and insights showed if there had been any cross-pollination from their process in the equine activities and their personal and professional development. That is, did the students noticed something about themselves that led towards any changes in their personal and professional journey towards becoming a therapist?

The equine activities that were conducted in the course were not altered or rearranged in any way to fit this study. The activities themselves were not progressive, and specific ones did not have to be performed in order to get a desired result. Each equine activity, even those performed repeatedly (such as observation and taking the horse for a walk) offered the students different meanings and metaphors.

The students all signed a media release form, which allowed for the researcher to take photographs of them during the equine course, and also for the photographs to be posted onto Stable Place's social media page. This process has been in place since August 2011 for the equine course. During the three hours that the students performed the equine activities, I took photographs and videos of each student. I took the photographs with my personal phone, which was password and fingerprint encrypted, and later downloaded to an external hard-drive that was also password encrypted. Students were often expecting to see their photographs uploaded because they wanted to see themselves during the equine activities and share them with friends and family. Students had also signed a consent form that had been previously approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to participate in the study without interference with grades and/or evaluations in the course.

After the photographs were taken, the researcher selected a few significant ones from each student performing a task and arranged them by student name in a PowerPoint slide presentation. Many photographs taken during the equine activities would have been significant, but this would have lead to countless hours of processing. In order to reduce that time, only certain photographs and videos were chosen. These significant photographs were picked at my discretion. Bernard and Goodyear (2004) summarize this by stating, "Because IPR can be a lengthy process, 'choosing the most interpersonally weighted or most metaphorically meaningful segment of tape will be most productive for supervision purposes" (p. 220). These photographs were reflected back to the students the following week when the class met indoors. Students had an opportunity to view themselves performing the equine activities in a way that encouraged further internal processing. Larsen et al. (2008) summarizes the process best:

A key feature of the IPR training interview is to focus trainees on their thoughts and feelings as they remember these to have occurred during the session rather than encouraging critiques or self-confrontation while viewing the video-recorded session. The result is that trainees become more sensitive to and explicit about their internal processes during human interactions. (p. 20)

For the discussion part of the study, the student whose photograph came up first in the slides was asked to speak first and later the other classmates would offer their thoughts about what they noticed, "Although either the supervisee or supervisor can stop the video tape, the individual who stops the tape must initiate the discussion by noting why the portion of the session was relevant to them" (Orchowski, Evangelista, & Probst, 2010, p. 60). During this time, the students were audio recorded. I exclusively used the

recording device and the recorded files were kept securely in the researcher's computer under password lock. The recordings were transcribed and also kept in a file on the researcher's computer under password lock. In order to gather specific data from the transcriptions, the researcher coded the content. The students who did not wish to participate did not have their portion of their discussion transcribed.

In order to secure the anonymity of the students, each student who participated in the study was assigned a code that only the researcher only knew. If students mentioned names during their discussion, the names were replaced with a code.

For the purposes of disclosure to the students, they were notified verbally and in their written consent that their grades and/or evaluation for the course would not be affected in anyway by what they said, or if they participated or not. Therefore, the transcription of the data was done after the course had been completed and final grades submitted. The researcher reasoned that this would ease the student's anxiety in participating, and reduce their need to filter what they wanted to discuss in their reflections of the equine activities.

I also conducted a semi-structured interview with the students that enrolled in the equine class in the Winter 2014. These semi-structured questions were unstructured enough to allow for the "discovery of new ideas and themes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 351). Since the students had already seen the photographs and discussed them, it was my intent to explore what they took away, if anything, after a year of participating in the equine activities. The students from the winter term were contacted and the researcher explained the study's purpose via email with a consent form attached. The consent form included written information about the study and asked for authorization to audio record their

interview. Once the student had returned the signed consent form, a time and day was arranged for the interview. In accordance with grounded theory research (Creswell, 2013), “the primary form of data collection is often interviewing in which the researcher is constantly comparing data gleaned from participants with ideas from the emerging theory” (p. 85). The students were interviewed individually in a private room on the campus of Nova Southeastern University. The names of the students were de-identified and replaced with a code known only to the researcher. For a comprehensive view of the semi-structured questions for the interview, see Appendix A. The interview was scheduled to take less than 30 minutes, depending on the length of the participant’s answers. Once the class discussions and the interviews were transcribed verbatim, they were coded with emerging themes and new ideas that were found to be “conceptually similar in nature or related in meaning” (Creswell, 2013, p. 352). These codes were then placed into categories or concepts to form the theoretical model (Creswell, 2013). The goal of creating this theoretical model was to create a framework that explained the central theme of data and thus, develop the grounded theory.

In conclusion, there were two sets of data collected. The first was the transcriptions of the class discussions from the students reflecting on their photographs, which corresponded to the Fall 2014 and Winter 2015 term. The second was of the Winter 2014 equine class and the transcriptions that were made from their semi-structured individual interviews.

Participants

The sample size was different for the students that were recorded in the more recent introductory class, and the students who previously took the class. For the audio-

recorded discussions, the sample size was between five to nine participants, respectively. Data samples consist of the amount of times class discussions took place, rather than the amount of participants involved. Between the Fall 2014 and the Winter 2015 class, there were a total of six (6) class discussions. For the individual interviews from the Winter 2014 class, there were eight students who were enrolled in the class, five of whom participated. This made the total possible sample size of 11 sets of data, which is the typical sample size for qualitative studies and enough to reach a saturation point in the data (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, and Jiao, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Morse, 1994).

Demographics. The participants were Master's or Doctoral students at Nova Southeastern University (NSU), Davie, Florida campus. More specifically, most were students from the Marriage and Family Therapy program while one student was from the Psychology department. The inclusion criteria for this research required students to have taken and passed the Advanced or Introduction Equine Assisted Family Therapy course at NSU. The advanced course has as a prerequisite of the introductory class. Since most of the students were women, the study was composed largely from the women who have taken the course and a few men that have participated as well. The ages of the participants ranged from 25 to 60 years old. All participants were active students at the university and reside in the state of Florida. The exclusion criteria restricted any students who have not taken either of the courses or who were no longer active students in the program and/or university (i.e. dropped out of classes, moved away, etc.).

Recruitment and Initial Contact. The participation of the students for this study was voluntary. The students were notified that their grade and/or evaluation for the course would in no way be affected and the transcription of the information gathered

would be done after final grades had been turned in. For the students that had already taken the course in the Winter 2014 term, there had been no effect on their grade and the professor of the class was an evaluator during this time.

The students were initially contacted after they had registered for the course and before the equine activities were performed. Students were told that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. The students who wished to participate were given a consent form, which explained the study and their participation. The students that had already taken the course were contacted via email with an attached consent form, and asked if they wished to participate. The students were also told that their participation was purely voluntary. Once the researcher received the signed consent form, an interview time and date was set.

Ethical considerations

It was important to maintain ethical and confidentiality boundaries for this research. Since this research included human subjects, confidentiality and ethics were a central concern to ensure the participation of the volunteers. The content of what the students were sharing was personal and touched on sensitive topics for the student. Therefore, several procedures were taken to ensure that the students and their information were treated confidentially and ethically throughout the study.

During the explanation of the study and upon getting consent from the students, they were notified that they could withdraw their participation at any time during the study. If they chose to withdraw, they would not be judged, asked any questions, or have their grades in the class be affected by their decision. Also, any comments that they

contributed whether in an individual interview or in the class discussion were withdrawn and destroyed. For this study, none of the students withdrew.

The nature of this study did not ask for the name, address, or telephone number for the participants to be a part of the study. Each student that volunteered for the study was given a code (e.g., WW14.1) that was known only to the researcher. The transcription of the conversation did not include the names of the participants and they were referred to by their code name. The pseudonyms codes consent forms, and transcriptions were secured under lock and key, and password encrypted on the researcher's computer.

Summary

The personal experiences and thoughts of the student trainees were elicited, and analyzed in this research project. The classroom discussions were recorded and transcribed, as well as individual interviews. The individual interviews followed a semi-structured interview format. The purpose of the individual interviews was to determine any lasting effect of the equine activities on the personal and professional development of the student. The Semi-Structured Interview questions are found in Appendix A. The discussion and shared experiences of the students are analyzed and discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study was to determine what, if any, influence the equine activities had on the personal and clinical development of the students who took the Introduction to Equine Assisted Family Therapy course.

Interpersonal Process Research (IPR) was utilized to explore the students' responses to class activities and to allow them to reflect on their experiential process. Two sets of data were collected for this study, and a total of eleven transcriptions were analyzed. The first data set included audio recorded and transcribed discussions from the Fall 2014 and Winter 2015 Introduction to Equine Family Assisted Therapy course. The Fall 2014 class was composed of five students (all female), four from the Master's Program in Family Therapy and one doctoral student from the Clinical Psychology program. The Winter 2015 class was made up of nine female students, four from the Master's Program in Family Therapy and five from the Ph.D. Family Therapy program. Within this set of data, six class discussions were recorded, three from the Fall 2014 and three from Winter 2015 class. The class discussions ranged from one hour to two hours and forty minutes. Some students were absent from class at the time that the class discussions took place. The class discussions centered on the photographs and video of the students performing the equine activities a week or so earlier.

The second set of data consisted of individual interviews with the students who took the Introduction to Equine Assisted Therapy course in the Winter 2014 term. The students were interviewed one year after taking the Introduction to Equine Assisted Family Therapy course to determine whether there were any lasting effects from the experiential and research components of the class in terms of their personal and clinical

development. Out of the eight students in the class, five students agreed to be interviewed. Of the three students that were not interviewed, one dropped from the Family Therapy program, one did not give her email to be interviewed, and one could not be interviewed because of scheduling conflicts. The student who dropped out of the program was not interviewed because he or she did not meet the criteria of being currently enrolled in the program. Out of the five interviewed, four were female, one was male, and all were in the Nova Southeastern University Family Therapy Ph.D. program. The semi-structured interview consisted of eleven questions and varied from twenty minutes to thirty-eight minutes. The questions were intended to gather information from the students as to how, if at all, their clinical and personal development was influenced through the IPR process a year ago previously.

Data Analysis

After both sets of data were transcribed, I used open coding to analyze the data. The two sets of data, (i.e., the class discussions and interviews), were read through and categorized by the emerging themes found within the statements of the students. Using open coding, two main themes were identified within the transcriptions as well as five emerging sub-themes. The two main themes were: “Personal Development” and “Clinical Development.” I began with these two themes since they were part of the research question that the study sought to explore. Additionally, these two main themes were the focus of the analysis with the two sets of data in order to develop a grounded theory. From these two themes, five leading sub-themes emerged and were grouped based on the topic discussed and its relationship to the main theme. For example, under the theme of “Personal Development,” subthemes of “Personal Awareness” and

“Changes in Interpersonal Relationships” were categorized. Likewise, under “Clinical Development,” subthemes of “Self of the Therapist,” “Clinical Skills” and “Viewing Therapy Differently” emerged.

The names of the participants in both the class discussions and the interviews were coded, except my name and the professor of the class during the class discussion. Since there was one male participant, his name was also coded similarly to the other participants in a manner that the code did not reveal gender. For the purposes of analysis, the students were referred to as “she” in order to further protect the identity of the male student. Therefore, if I stated the name of the student during their reflections, it was also coded to protect the identity of the student mentioned. The only initials that were not coded were that of myself as the researcher and the professor, identified as “DG” and “DSG,” respectively. Also, there was an equine specialist present for one of the class discussions, and she was identified in the transcript as “ES.” Finally, the names “Paris” and “China” found in some of the excerpts, are the names of the horses that the students interacted with during their equine activities. Names of the students were not written on any document saved and the document in its entirety was titled “Interview 1” or “Class discussion 1.” The audio recordings were downloaded into my computer and were password protected. As per the requirements of grounded theory, I kept a journal to record thoughts about photography, how I decided to take photographs and how I chose which photograph to display on the PowerPoint for the class discussion (Creswell, 2013).

Discussion

The developing theory suggests that equine activities and the processing of the equine activities have an effect on the personal and clinical development of the students

in the class. As stated in chapter two, the equine activities gave the students the ability to make connections and metaphors within their personal lives, and apply these as well to their clinical development. Since these were connections that were already taking place during the class discussions, I wanted to analyze how and what areas the changes were taking place in.

The two main themes, Personal Development and Clinical Development provided the starting point for the coding of the two sets of data transcribed. This was followed by the feedback for the class and how IPR influenced their understanding of themselves performing the equine activities. These two themes were prominent within the class discussions and within the interviews a year later.

The next section of this chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the themes and their subcategories. The section begins with the personal development and its subcategories of “Personal Awareness” and “Changes in their Interpersonal Relationships.” Students described different ways in which the view of themselves shifted between their own self-perception and how others perceived them, as well as how they began to incorporate these shifts in their day-to-day lives and interpersonal relationships. The next component was the clinical development and the subcategories of “Self of the Therapist,” “Clinical Skills” and “Viewing Therapy Differently.” Students explained ways in which they became aware of new and existing clinical skills that they had as well as how they were shifting their views on how they did therapy. Students also gave examples of what they were doing differently with their clinical cases in the Brief Therapy Institute (BTI) at NSU. BTI is a community clinic where MFT Master’s and Ph.D. students intern and see families, couples and individuals along with other student

therapists and approved supervisors. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of the themes and their respective subcategories.

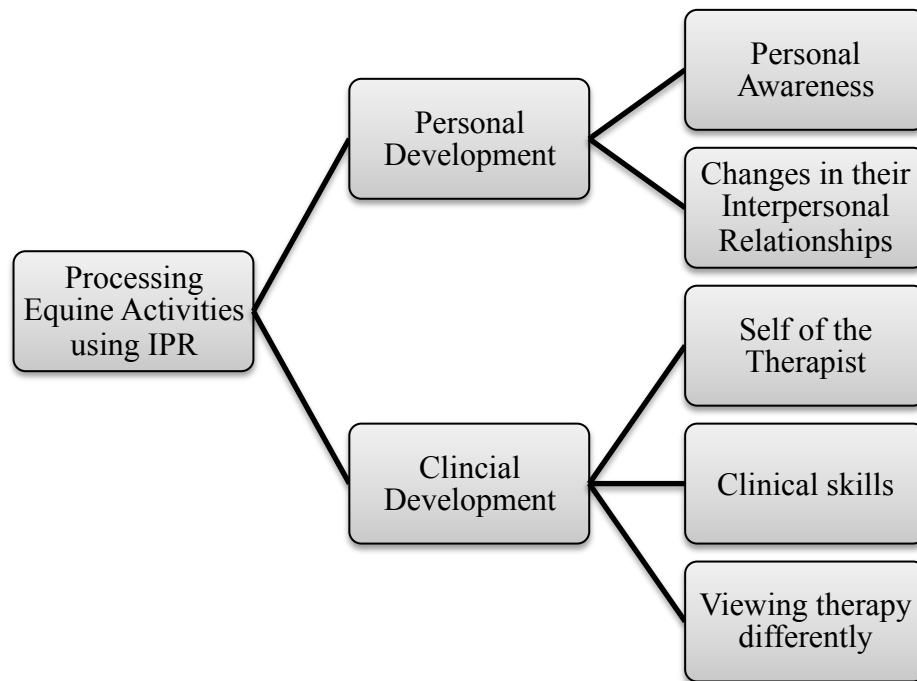


Figure 1. Breakdown of Themes and Subcategories

In order to discuss the emerging themes, excerpts from the transcripts were used to show how students made sense of their personal and clinical development. Below are two different tables that show how many times the themes were talked about between both sets of data. Table 1 provides the six different class discussions and how many times the personal and clinical themes were discussed, along with the subcategories. The first three class discussions were from the Fall 2014 class and the last three class discussions were from the Winter 2015 class. Table 2 shows the interview sample and how many times the themes and subcategories emerged in the conversation. Each student took the Equine course in the Winter 2014 term.

Table 1

Coding chart for class discussions

Class discussion	Frequency of Topics Discussed							Total
	Personal Development	Personal Awareness	Changes in Interpersonal Relationships	Clinical Development	Self of the Therapist	Clinical Skills	Viewing Therapy Differently	
Class discussion 1	3	4		3		2		12
Class discussion 2	2	4		1		3		10
Class discussion 3	1	4		3				8
Class discussion 4	2	3	1	5		2		13
Class discussion 5	2		2	3	1	2		10
Class discussion 6	2	2	1	2			1	8
Total	12	17	4	17	1	9	1	

Note: *Table 1*. The table shows the interview sample and how many times the themes and subcategories emerged in the conversation.

Within the six topics, Personal Development, Personal Awareness and Clinical Development were the most mentioned and reflected upon during the classroom discussions. These were followed by discussions about the Clinical Skills and Changes in Interpersonal Relationships, mentioned nine and four times respectively. Overall, the classroom discussions showed more conversations surrounding Personal Development, and less in the theme of Clinical Development. Although class discussions 1-3 were composed of five students, they yielded a high number of reflections related to Personal Development and Awareness. Class discussions 4-6 were composed of nine students and yielded a high number of reflections within the clinical development topic. Students

observing their photographs and/or video and then commenting on what they noticed initiated the topics discussed. Interestingly, the number of students in a class discussion did not affect the number of times that a topic was examined. This could be due in part because of the feedback received by other students, rather than having less or more feedback received. It appeared that hearing the perspective of other students in relation to their photograph influenced the topics discussed. Several students during both class discussions and individual interviews remarked on the benefit they received from the comments that the other students gave them and how they made sense of them in their personal life and clinical development. The following excerpt highlights the importance of this process:

WF14.3: Just tremendous self-knowledge and doing it in a group was really important, getting feedback, hearing other people reflect on what was happening was really important so um it really was this kind of like, like a mirroring that was going on, the horses were mirroring what was happening to me and then the people mirroring what they saw and then reflecting back on the images I had seen and what people had said and then I would go do therapy and then therapy would mirror what I had done with the horses and then I would reflect on that and then I would go with the horses and then talk about that, you know that recursive process happening.

The feedback that the students gave each other based on their observations of the photographs influenced the perception that they had of each other. For example, one student stated that she often felt disconnected from people and one student replied:

WW15.4: In all the pictures that I have seen of you and working with you and the horses, you have always been in the middle and connecting people with the equine task. So I have felt you as being very connected with people.”

WW15.5: Yeah! That’s true

WW15.8: Oh, that’s right.

WW15.3: Oh yeah, you do!

WW15.9: That’s true. I can see that now. I hadn’t really thought of that but you are right.

Through the students’ positive feedback based on the photographs they were seeing at the time, they provided a different perspective to the student and showed an alternative perspective to how she viewed herself. These types of conversations elicited the topics that were found and coded within the classroom discussions.

For the interviews conducted and transcribed, the topics were also tallied. Although they did not have the feedback from other students during the audio recording, they recalled the feedback they had heard a year before and talked about their observations of themselves and others. Nonetheless, the topics that did come up during the interview were counted. In the following page, Table 2 shows the frequency of the topics discussed within the five interviews conducted.

Table 2

Coding Chart for Interviews

Interviews	Frequency of Topics Discussed						
	Personal development	Personal awareness	Changes in Interpersonal relationships	Clinical development	Self of the therapist	Clinical skills	Viewing therapy differently
Interview 1	1	2	2	1	1	2	3
Interview 2	2	2		2	2	2	
Interview 3	2	4	1	1	2	3	
Interview 4	1	2	2	4	2	2	2
Interview 5	1	3		1	2	1	1
Total	7	13	5	9	9	10	6

Note: *Table 2.* The table shows the frequency of the topics discussed within the five interviews conducted.

For the interviews, the students were asked eleven questions in a semi-structured interview. Among the questions asked were what, if anything, the students recalled from the class in regards to a particular photograph and/or video, and if they had noticed any personal and clinical changes and/or differences since the equine course. The list of questions can be found in Appendix A. Although the questions encouraged responses, students could state that they didn't see a change or any development a year later after seeing their photographs and/or video and doing equine activities. I did not assume that there were changes and developments but rather left the questions open-ended so that the students could have the flexibility to share their thoughts. During the interview, students were not re-exposed to their photographs; therefore their answers were based on what they recalled a year after taking the equine course. Consequently, there was a longitudinal aspect to the interview where students not only commented on their personal

and clinical development but also on the effects that seeing themselves in the photographs and/or video participating in the equine activities had on them at the time.

Overall, the topics that were mentioned most frequently during the interviews were “Personal Awareness” and “Clinical Skills,” with thirteen and ten mentions, respectively. Since the interviews took place a year later, the students talked more about what they noticed differently in themselves in the clinical aspect. “Clinical Development” and “Self of the Therapist” were the second most mentioned topics within the interviews, each with nine mentions. One could infer that the students in the interview were able to apply what stood out for them personally and apply it clinically a year later. Also, since all the students that were interviewed were in the Ph.D. program, the stage that they were within their studies was more clinically advanced, and therefore, the conversation was more clinically oriented. Out of the five interviewees, only one student stated that she could not recall a specific photograph and/or video a year later that influenced her, but remember the course as a whole as being influential:

WF14.2: I don’t know if it was from the pictures or videos, I would just say that the whole class, and I can’t really differentiate the media from the class, but I would say that I am a heck of a lot more, kinda aware of my own introspection and place in the system with other people, and clients and just becoming a little more sensitive to what else is going on other than just being in my head (laughs). I know I am being kinda vague, it’s also been a year later. But even when I tell people about the class, you learn a lot about yourself and how you interact with others and how other people or horses (laughs) interact with you. Because you

are looking at horses as a metaphor with people too, and how you are aware of that.

For each topic mentioned in the chart, the two main themes were “Personal development” and “Clinical development.” I defined the analysis regarding “Personal Development” as knowledge about oneself, which branched out to the two subcategories of “Personal Awareness” and “Changes in the Interpersonal Relationships.” I also defined “Personal Awareness” as realizing something new about oneself that was either unknown or unfamiliar, and “Changes in Interpersonal Relationships” as the application of this awareness with people around them, including family, friends and significant others. This theme and its subcategories were analyzed first. This was followed by the analysis with “Clinical development” and its subcategories. As mentioned before, the class discussions and interviews were not analyzed separately but analyzed by theme and subcategory. In order to understand the conversation and relationship that the students had with their personal and clinical development and the photographs of them doing equine activities, excerpts were used to expand on each theme and subcategory.

Personal Development

For the theme of Personal Development, students reflected on their experience with the equine activities and how they were overcoming personal obstacles, while at the same time shifting the view of themselves. For example, one student shared a traumatic experience that she had when she was younger where a horse had kicked her in the face and she had lost a tooth. When she was asked to clean the horse’s hoof as part of the experiential class activity, she was not able to do it alone and was offered assistance. Another student jumped in to help her pick up the hoof and then let her do the exercise

once she was had a grip on the horse. The student was asked how she felt about it and she replied:

WW15.2: “Like, relieved I was like really happy with myself and I feel really good like I did it, like I faced that fear that I had and like I faced it and I did it! I was a little bit proud of myself and yeah I started smiling after.”

On the other hand, one student was able to embrace the side of her that was vulnerable instead of ignoring it and making it a weakness:

WF14.1: The horses are so... they are just beautiful, beautiful creatures. I mean they are strong and they stand up tall and they show their vulnerabilities and they are still very, very, strong animals. And I think that for me, I have vulnerable moments but I am still a strong woman and I think that its important that I can be ok with both of those and not see vulnerability as a weakness or be afraid to show my vulnerability to the public, especially in a marriage and family therapy program, which is ironic. But yeah it's ok, the both/and. It's ok for me to be strong and hold my head high and it's also ok for me to be vulnerable and use my instincts like the horses do and being ok with walking away cause they will walk away if they feel some danger because they don't necessarily go toward it and that is something that they helped me realize... that you can be strong and walk away from danger. That's pretty cool and I try to take into account whenever someone cuts me off (laughs) on the road. Those things help me and I think about the horses and what they would do (laughs).

The topic of personal development also came up during class discussions where the professor and other students were able to provide feedback to the student in a way

that challenged what they thought about themselves. In this specific case, the student struggled with viewing herself as a “good communicator” and struggled with the ability to be direct with her clients and in her life. The following is an excerpt of that class discussion:

W2F14.4: And I was apprehensive to take that position, um I guess it's because I'm kinda nervous with my communication. I think sometimes I struggle getting my words out and that's hard for me because I am very aware of it so in session I want to be perfect, I want to say the right things, I don't want to be sucked in. I want to be direct and I want my point to get across and my position is all about that... I was like “No! That is going to be testing everything that I am nervous about.”

W2F14.1: But you are so good at it.

W2F14.4: And see that that was very powerful for me and I wrote about it in my journal and the positive feedback that I got and how much reassurance that gave me, and it's just funny how hard I am about myself. And then I am constantly getting this positive feedback but I am still doubting. I am still doubting and it's just a constant cycle (laughing). But it was cool for me because I am even quoted Abby [equine specialist] and she said, “You can tell she is a therapist,” and that for me was like “Wow! Holy crap!” and (laughs) like “This is what I am striving for” and I mean it shows and that was like really, really cool for me.

Through the equine activity performed at the time, and through the feedback of the students and the equine specialist that participated in the activity with her, the student realized that she was able to communicate better than she thought. Interestingly, she

shared that she had received the feedback previously but she had not assimilated it. Through her work with the equine therapy, she was able to come to the realization of the feedback and make sense of it. This type of personal development also came up with students who shifted their perspective between how they thought they were and how others viewed them.

During a class discussion, a student brought up the fact that she did not like asking for help and she rarely spoke up even though she was unable to accomplish a task. She stated,

WW15.2: I don't want to bother anyone by asking for help and I feel like I can try and figure it out first. It's very hard for me to ask for help.

This student had done several equine activities where she was helped by other students to accomplish a task. She did not ask for the help so the students volunteered to assist her. However, they did not have to do the task for her in order to help her, they simply began the task and she would take it over from them. For example, the student had to clean the hoof of the horse and another student got the hoof up for her, released it in the student's hand and then she was able to clean it and hold it. This was demonstrated on the photographs taken during class and Dr. Green offered the feedback "You only need a little bit of help because it makes you do so much." The student was able to shift her idea regarding help from being about bothering others to how help could empower her to accomplish a goal. This personal transformation could be applied to how she views herself, how she interacts with people in her world and/or activities that she does outside of a clinical and school setting. Another student in an individual interview was

able to connect an extra-curricular activity outside of school and seeing clients with the photographs of her performing the equine activities a year earlier:

WF14.3: I am working on a piece of theater right now and I think about that photograph because it also connects to me as a performer how when I am trying to really hard to show the emotion its like, “Oh no, you lost us all” and so how to find a way to perform as well. So it’s affected me in that way as well.

In this excerpt, the student was able to recall a particular photograph and connect it with a present activity in a way that provided development towards performing in the theater better. Finally, a student recalled during the interview a part of herself that she could relate with the horses and their behavior. The following is an excerpt from that conversation:

WF14.6: I was bullied as a kid really bad and I got beat up [at school] quite a bit and for years and it went on. I was too afraid to say anything. It was not good and I felt like prey. I felt like “Oh God, I am going to go to school and I am going to get killed today, I am not going to make it out of here.” I was afraid for my life, virtually every day, and I was too afraid to tell my stepdad because I was afraid that he was going to beat me up so I really had no resource. These horses are prey animals and they hear what’s out there and I know that their eyes get real big when they see something or they think they see something and they are like “Oh” and all of them would look and it’s not just one, so I feel like I can resonate with them and I feel like I can understand and say “Look, it’s ok.” I just wish somebody had been there to tell me that it’s ok (voice breaking). So I get it. I can match with them. I can be close, and I think that they pick it up.

DG: Yeah.

WF14.6: Because they are not threatened by me. People can be and they are like “You are intimidating; you are scary” and I am like you have no idea how I am and it breaks me down every time but the horses, they get it, they know me. So that makes me feel really good.

In this excerpt the student could relate their past of being bullied to how the horses need to be aware of their surroundings in order to survive. The reflections of this student were profound and meaningful, which added a therapeutic element to what these students experienced and took away from the course. Although it was made clear to the students that these classes were educational and experiential rather than therapeutic, it was inevitable for some of them to experience a therapeutic moment. This shows the ability of equine work to affect students on a deep level. For many of the students, the feedback also allowed them to discover a different side of themselves and become aware of how others viewed them.

Personal Awareness

In a class discussion excerpt, a student summarizes how the photographs and/or video, including the student’s feedback was able to create awareness of other sides of themselves that were invisible to them:

WW15.4: I just feel that it is so effective because I just heard everyone’s comments about what they maybe haven’t noticed before and so it just brings another level of awareness of how we are and we are able to in a way relate it to, you know, clinically and systemically and you know so we are just able to bring that level of mindfulness that we were talking about with the puddle [quote from

Shel Silverstein], you know? And I love that it just kinda comes together and brings out things that we've never been aware of or that everyone's told us something about it but then when we see it for ourselves, our own eyes, it can change our whole life, how we've seen ourselves and so maybe we are not like that, maybe that's not true, and what really is true is really beautiful.

The excerpt describes not only the level of awareness that was created from viewing the photographs, but the application of this newfound awareness as well. The student also included how having this awareness or "level of mindfulness" also influenced her clinical work.

The following excerpt is from a conversation where the student became aware that she was very different from the label she had been given for years. This awareness came from viewing photographs of the equine activities and the feedback given by classmates and the professor.

W2F14.1: I am still very focused. I am surprised to see how very focused I am cause a lot of my friends and everyone I speak to, and my family, they consider me very ADD and very all over the place so I am very surprised that I am this focused in these pictures. I never thought of myself as focused or... I always thought that I was all over the place and disorganized. But it doesn't seem like that at all. It's the opposite actually. It's kinda like weird. I'm emotional... (voice breaking) because you think of yourself in a certain way for such so long but then you are like "Wait, I am not like that."

DSG: It's emotionally focused.

DG: So what makes it emotional?

W2F14.1: The realization that the way people see me and what I have been told is not true. Or maybe I am just more focused on horses? Or more focused on tasks? I am just trying to figure out how I am with people versus horses or like if I am given a task am I hyper-focused? I don't know. I am trying to figure out when I am focused and when I am not focused. I guess it can be both. It doesn't have to be one or the opposite. Either or. I feel comfortable that I said that.

The reader can almost follow the evolution of thought of the student from thinking that they were distracted; to thinking that they could focus; to thinking that they could experience both and that its is OK with them. More importantly, the student was able to come to the conclusion without a label given from another person. The reflections that the student made stem from the view that she had from the photograph of the equine activity. By examining herself in the photograph, the student was able to discover another side of her that had been overshadowed by comments of those around her.

Another student in the individual interview noted that the photographs combined with the students' feedback added to the learning awareness for her:

WF14.6: Traditionally, you wouldn't get to see yourself working and I think that it was very beneficial to my learning process not only on how other people were perceiving me reacting to the horse but I could also watch the horses interaction better instead of just being in the experience but I could take a step back now and say "Wow! I look sad or I look happy" or "Oh look at what everybody else is doing?" So it was a very effective process for me to see those pictures and those videos. It was very helpful in my learning process.

The main point articulated by the two students is that being able to see what was going on around them and seeing themselves doing the activities created a new level of self-awareness. The purpose of the photographs was to take the student back to the moment that they were performing the activities, as well as to allow them to incorporate what was happening around them with the other students and the horses. This phenomenon of “zoning out” from what was going on around the student or not being aware of what was happening with the other students or horses was found throughout the classroom discussions and interviews. Students reported not being able to remember the other student’s names, forgetting that other students were in the arena with the horses and even becoming deaf to sounds around them. The following are excerpts from different students during class discussions regarding this phenomenon:

WW15.3: I noticed that when it was just um me and the horse, like I forgot that everyone was in the arena and I didn’t notice anyone until someone started actually speaking and they like all like disappeared so I am not sure what that means but I noticed that.

WW15.4: Me too, I also like when people do things on their own but I was very relaxed and that point because this picture is after I was crying and that brought me very centered and to myself and the way that Paris wrapped her head around me that was, I mean, I was like not paying attention to anybody so at this point I was in such a neutral space and it was really nice and like no thoughts and I think that’s why WW15.6 and I went through it without effort.

W2F14.5: When this kind of stuff happens, I will be honest, I don’t have... It’s weird, it’s almost like my senses polarize and it’s just touch sensation and I don’t

really hear anything and I don't see like I am not focusing on like seeing something specific or hearing, like those things are... they are all like all of that energy is going towards physical sensations. It's weird so I feel like with these kind of things my senses are polarized so I can't tell you specifically what I am looking at because there isn't anything or everything is channeled on to that one sense, to that system. It's a little bit odd cause I don't have that in any other, you know, areas of my life except with this kinda of stuff with the horses.

WW15.1: There was something else that I wanted to add, I didn't feel anything that was going around me, I wasn't paying attention to who was looking, who was doing anything, its like my focus was the horse, and that's all. So yeah, I'm sure that gave me a sense of comfort because I didn't see anything else except how do I lead that horse.

The experiential nature of the equine activities can be seen in the descriptions that the students provided regarding their experience. When the students were shown the photographs a week or so later, they were able to first realize that they become almost entranced with the activity and later incorporated their body posture and their environment with the reflection of their personal development and awareness. A student summarized this process well in an individual interview by stating:

WF14.4: The experience that I had when I was in the moment in the class when I was there was one thing and then seeing the pictures afterwards when you have perspective on it, it's pretty cool because you get to see how like you might have been interpreting it that day and you get to see basically another perspective and you get to reflect on that.

On the other hand, some students recalled what was going on in their mind or their thoughts by viewing the photographs and/or video of the equine activity. Following is a conversation between the student and the professor in which the student is recalling an equine activity and is unable to recall her fellow classmates' names. What is interesting about this conversation is that the student sees other areas in her life where she "blanks out" and finds a way to work through it.

W2F14.4: So at this moment, I was so wrapped up in like, I guess I was hyper-vigilant and like ok "I need to be direct" and so I was over analyzing this moment, that I forgot everyone's name. I was standing there (laughs) I was like "Oh my God, I don't want to say the wrong name," and I was like taking my time talking, like "What is the name?" and it came out and I was like, once I got that, I was like "Ok. See what are you doing, it's ok" it was funny.

DSG: Well, yeah. You slowed yourself down until you could access what you needed to access.

W2F14.4: And it's funny because sometimes I don't do that and I am teaching myself to do that because I tend to get really nervous and kinda let my feelings take over and I didn't want that to happen because I am like, "You are in class with these girls. You know their names. What are you talking about?" I mean it's something so silly but I didn't want to get that point where this is not going to happen, you are not going to show it (laughs). But it's funny because I am a nervous presenter and for some reason it makes me think of...I am presenting at a conference next week and I get super, super nervous and being in front of people and again with my communication and my thinking and my feelings take over and

I... for me I feel like it reads where you can see it and I get a lot of feedback that you can't see it, and I am like "You're nuts!" I feel it so much that you can see it, you can for sure see it but I guess that it doesn't show but I do a good job hiding it, which is good. I don't know where that all came from these pictures.

From this conversation it seems that photographs were the catalyst for these conversations to take place but it was the equine activities that brought up these thoughts and reflections for the students. In another example, a student in an interview commented on how just being outside and working with horses helped start the process of self-awareness:

WF14.4: It's helped me reflect a lot on myself because I would have to say that prior to this, especially prior to the whole program in general I probably didn't do a whole heck of a lot reflecting myself (laughs) so it's definitely highlighted that aspect of my life, being able to reflect on just my process and kind of my values and what I find important and also notice what others find important in what they find of value and how we can all mesh together and so it's really probably got me to focus more on that in my life and just kinda of my role in all of it and things like that and kinda of what I bring to the table is a lot of (laughs) is what ends up shaping my role in certain situations. So I learned that a lot working with the horses is that it depends a lot on what you are bringing to the table that day, that week, that semester.

From this quote we can understand that the student gained a focus that had not been highlighted in this student's life before by working with the horses. This student also incorporates what the other students discover in themselves and how those two

descriptions can create a shared meaning. The following quote shows how a student was able to obtain personal development by reflecting on the equine activity that they participated in:

W2F14.5: I think after this exercise I thought about like how much trust is required from that and I used to be the complete opposite and completely untrusting. So it was a nice contrast in my own development, so I really liked this activity because of that. I kinda of got to gauge my own changes throughout the years.

The reflections that the students made regarding their personal developments and awareness was also transforming how they related to family and friends.

Change in Relationships

The researcher had expected to notice how the students were becoming self-aware and discovering areas of their lives that were hidden. What was unexpected was to see how they were applying this newfound discovery within their current relationships. The excerpts found in this sub-theme show how students have applied their personal awareness into their relationships with others and how people around them were noticing changes in the students. The following is an excerpt from a class discussion where the professor asked a student about the activity and the student shared that it was hard to not have control over the situation and having to follow another student's directions. This student later added how she applied this "lesson" with an interpersonal relationship:

DSG: What was it like for you to...because you said "I am not the brain so I am not supposed to think" So what was it like for you to know that the saddle wasn't put on and that you couldn't do anything about it?

WW15.8: So that has actually transferred into my relationship (laughing). My boyfriend and I were driving somewhere and he was going in a direction and I was like “Why are you going this way?” And then I was like “You know what? I am letting it go. You know where you are going and I am letting it go.” And I said it out loud too come to think of it. And it helped.

DSG: And he was probably like “Thank you”

WW15.8: Yes! And so it’s definitely a lesson that I took home with me and have practiced. But it’s not easy. I still reacted and then I let go.

The student states that this “lesson” was something that was difficult to implement but nonetheless had applied it in her relationship. However, this student realized that doing something different, something that this student had learned from her experience with the equine activities, changed the way she communicated in the relationship. In doing so, she changed the usual response she would give to her significant other while driving. This awareness, although small, shows the changes that students take from their equine experience. The following excerpt is from an interview where the student explains how a specific equine activity brought to life the dynamics of her role in her family system:

WF14.3: The first few times that I worked with the horses it was like I couldn’t get them to do anything particular and then this one day I was in this really good mood, and it was the first time that I had shown up in the barn in a really good mood and we had the instruction to get the horses from one end to the other and I put my hand on the horse’s back and you know the horse started to move and it really felt like it was responding to my communication through my center and um

it was exhilarating and I felt like I was moving the horse and I said in the video, “I am moving the horse!” and then the horse started to get faster and then at one moment it took off and then suddenly somebody called my name and then another horse ran right by me, very close and I didn’t realize how close really I was until I saw the video and that became a really big symbol for me in terms of this effort and pushing and trying to make something happen in my own family... and something that I became aware that when you, when you are pushing hard in one part of the system the whole system reacts and I became cautious at that point and it made me think in my own family, “How hard do I want to push you? What are the potential consequences of this?” And sure enough, you know, some things happened in my own family where I still think that the way I was pushing my family at that point led to some changes in the system that were equivalent to that horse nearly knocking me down and I was starting to think about um having a bigger picture of my own family and my own life, seeing what happened with the horse show up in my own life, like when it happened you know my family was going through this crisis you know, last year and I just thought I just kept thinking about pushing the horses and it just helped me legitimize how hard it is to deal with my own family um and not to feel guilty about the fact that I hadn’t fixed them, that I hadn’t fixed myself to see myself in the process to adapting to my emotional system and the, you know not just trying to make things better but thinking about it and understanding and my clinical work.

Based on the comments of this student, she was able to realize that the way that she was “pushing” the system was producing a specific response within the family. The

student was also able to relive the moment by seeing the video a week or so later and seeing just how close that horse ran by her. The student made the connection between this “symbol” and the student’s family system to the point where she recognized it when it happened in her family system. Also, the student was able to remember this moment in her life a year later. Another student, who was also interviewed, recalled a specific equine activity where her boundaries and her relationship to those boundaries shifted from being something that she did not want in her life to something that she could manage.

WF14.1: I remember one time I was with this horse and I kept wanting it to pay attention to me, and wanting it to love me, and you know finally when I kinda left it alone and left some space be, the horse started following me and I had no idea that the horse was following me. I was able to relate that in personal relationships in that I am always working really, really tough to be loved and to be cared for and its when I leave that space to be loved that someone is able to kinda of use that space and step in and so that was really, really powerful for me, as far as self of the therapist and dealing with boundaries, so kinda taking on these boundaries head on and because its usually the boundaries that are running over me but this time I was able to kinda face it and take charge and um set a boundary and when I was done with the horse, you know it was, I was able to stop that process. And then at the end when the horse was like, I am getting teary-eyed right now it was just so (voice breaking) comforting and loving. I cannot believe that I am getting teary eyed it was almost a year ago but it was really, really powerful work and when I saw the pictures of how the horse just kinda of put his little nose or his

muzzle I think they call it, that was just so precious to me and it was kinda letting me know that everything is ok and you are not alone. So that was really, really powerful for me, and I just (voice breaking) I am glad that I was able to be in touch with that because that it's a process in my life that I am continuing with how to make boundaries, how to set them and knowing what they are, and how to be ok with setting boundaries.

The student created a connection between what she wanted to have happen between herself and the horse and within her personal relationships. What created meaning for the student was that after the student walked away, the horse was able to come close to her. The action that the horse took could have been interpreted in several different ways, but the meaning that the student made created a significant moment for the student. At the same time, during another exercise, the student stated that that the horse represented "boundaries," which in most cases can be an abstract and intangible concept in a person's life, and her desire to create a relationship with them. In doing so, the student stated that she experienced the ability to face her boundaries and take charge of them, instead of letting the boundaries run her over. This experience was something that the student not only remembered a year later but also still produced an emotional reaction when she recalled it.

The excerpts and direct quotes from the class discussions and interviews summarize the personal development experienced by the students through the equine activities. These connections were made between themselves, the horses, and the equine activities, and resonated with their personal lives and relationships. In the same way that

the students created meaning for their personal development, clinical development was also apparent in the conversations during class discussions and interviews.

Clinical Development

The Introduction to Equine Assisted Family Therapy course began as a class that explored the value of using horses for therapeutic purposes in family therapy settings. Throughout the five terms in which the course had been taught, conversations began to evolve regarding how the students were becoming aware of themselves as therapists. After the students experienced being out with the horses and doing equine activities, these conversations revolved around how the students were implementing their clinical development into their views regarding therapy. In order to expand upon these points, excerpts will be used from the class discussions and interviews.

The first excerpt is from a class discussion where I was discussing how to let the clients figure out how to put on a halter or lead a horse in order for their therapeutic process to show up and unfold. A student was struck by this and related it to therapy, where it can be so easy to give advice and tell the client what to do. Another student concurred and related it to tutoring students in Math. The following is an excerpt from this conversation:

WW15.5: Even though we are processing and this is our activity but just to be able to know how to do this and just be able to observe and not say anything! Like it's so useful because that's what I am going through in my therapy and like I just have to like let it be.

DSG: Observe and don't judge it and don't try to correct it.

WW15.5: And even though your intentions are like you want to help you are so close, you are one millimeter, it takes a lot out of you.

WW15.8: I have tutored in math and a lot of what you are describing I remember feeling that way and like “Do it this way! I don’t know why you can’t see it!”

(laughing) and its always frustrating like once in a while when I explain

something and student didn’t get it and she went and found someone else and she gets it, and its like “but that’s what I said!” (laughing) and um, and that they do ask you and clients want to know what to do and you know what to do but you know its not right to tell them what to do and that oh my goodness, its not easy.

DSG: And I think that that is what is so cool about how this helps you be a better therapist. Because you learn that teaching horsemanship is “Do it like me,” and equine therapy is “Do it like you.” Let’s see how you do it and let’s learn your way and they [the clients] can go “Huh, I did it this way.”

Dr. Green commented about this process and stated concisely how equine therapy relates to talk-therapy. By letting the client go through the motions of problem solving and figuring out how to halter a horse, for example, we allow the clients to show up in a manner similar to how they are in “real life.” The clients are also able to show and observe how and what they do and that becomes the point of reflection between the therapist and client. This same process of allowing the clients to figure out different tasks was applied to the students in the equine course. By doing so, the isomorphic process became clear for the student to understand the experiential nature of equine therapy. In this next excerpt, the student related her day at the barn with the horses, to how a client may relate to a day in a therapy session:

WW15.3: Last week was also the first time that I was able to come up with a relation to my life like on the spot without having to go home and like process about it. It made me think about how in a therapy session you may not get a lot from your client the first week or the first month but they may be going home and thinking about things that you are saying and then all of a sudden they will show up one session and have all these things that you said like pour out in that session and for me that's like what barn day was like for me last week.

This isomorphic process also allowed for students to experience what it would be like if they were clients and in turn, how to process an equine session with a client. Students performed the same activities that would be asked of clients during an equine session. After the student has performed the equine activity and processed it, they can understand how a client would experience it and in what ways they might process it. Thus, some of the reflections that the students made could be similar to a conversation that a therapist would have with a client. However, the conversation that the students have in the equine course and the conversations that the client and therapist have during an equine session are different. The students discussed how they could do things differently being a therapist and how they viewed therapy differently; whereas the conversation with the client and therapist would relate to interpersonal challenges. There were areas where the conversations between the students in the class and potential clients overlapped such as when students talked about their personal awareness and development. The differences in these reflections were related to the context of the associated meanings. Students related their meanings to how they are as therapists rather than trying to solve their own interpersonal problems. In the next example, the student

reflected on a photograph that showed her cleaning the horse's hoof. This student's body was uncomfortably bent and very close to the ground. The following is the student's reflection of the photograph and how the associated meaning shows up in her work with clients:

W2F14.3: Yeah. I am in it. I am so close to the ground and it's like all the details are so clear and so blurry because I was so focused on the task but I was aware of everyone around me and I remember having a feeling of release, of relief when I did it because I remember saying, "Yes! China, thank you" (laughing) but I am still working and working real hard there. And I notice that I have been working hard with my clients these past couple of times that I have seen clients and I realized "Wow, I am working harder than my clients" and that's something that has been coming up for me but I think about what is leading me up to that moment. It's interesting.

In this reflection, the student not only has the realization that she is working hard with her clients but also had a physical connection to how it feels to work harder than the client by cleaning the hoof of the horse. The student states that she felt relief when the task was done although she was working hard in order to complete the activity instead of enjoying the process. If this reflection were to be taken further, the student could reflect on where or when she began working harder than what was required and where she sees that happening in the therapy room. This same equine activity elicited a different reflection from a student in the class where trust between therapy and client was related to cleaning a hoof:

W2F14.5: This is where I thought about when I had never thought about cleaning hooves before but like Dr. Green said, “What does it feel like when clients trust you?” and I drew a parallel between trust and when the horses drops its hoof into your hands and I had never thought of that metaphor before, and that is something that I took away from this, something as simple as cleaning hoofs.”

The student related to trust when describing how it feels when the horse dropped its hoof into the student’s hands, allowing the student to carry the weight of the hoof. This “dropping of the hoof” happens when the horse lets whoever is carrying the leg hold its weight. The ability of the same equine activity to create a variety of metaphors in the way that students view therapy is part of the reason why this work can be so meaningful. There is not one way to view a particular task but rather individual meaning is encouraged. The following quote is from an interview where the student comes up with an overall meaning for the equine activities and how they relate it to therapeutic work:

WF14.4: I would say that the activities have really taught me to be more in tune with myself in the room. So it’s really about how I am approaching situations, how I am approaching a new client, approaching a new session, maybe it’s the tenth session. Just how I am going into it, maybe my mind... maybe just what I am thinking about the possibilities and I think a lot of the activities helped us to go into these situations with really an open mind. And maybe some of them you would have a little bit more intent than other, which I think is like a session. You might go into the session with a little bit more intent than another session but it really allowed you to kind of practice those things and hone those skills in a different setting that wasn’t really a clinical setting. So I could approach

something like working with a horse and start to better understand how I would respond to that and then I am able to translate that in a way to how I would be in other situations. Maybe it's with a client, maybe it's working with a group, maybe it's doing a presentation. I mean it's really tied to a lot. I think that it's really allowed me to better see how I approach situations but then also how I am through those situations.

In this classroom discussion, a student and equine specialist reflected on how another student performed an equine activity. She was given feedback from two of her classmates about how she related well to children who were actively being seen in therapy and also from the equine specialist, who noticed how the student was projecting this ability by the way she was looking at the horse:

WW15.4: To me it looks like a gentle, kind of getting to know, you know someone.

ES: It's a look that you would give a precious little child, a gaze, and China is the child.

WW15.3: It's interesting that you said that because I am in WW15.2's practicum and WW15.2 has two children and she joins with them so beautifully. Like it would freak me out being in that room like...

WW15.2: Thank you.

WW15.3: The children are very resistant to talk, which I think that many are, but she just like, she has no problem getting on the floor and looking right at them and they are doing co-therapy and the co-therapist is over here and she is staying connected with the children and attuned to like how the children are feeling and

so hearing that you connect with a child. Last week she did an amazing job in the practicum.

WW15.2: Thank you (laughs). Sometimes I think that I am so bad, but thank you (laughs).

As stated previously, the feedback given by students who were also looking at the photographs, added to the meaning that the student in the photograph shared. The student performing the activity may not have believed or felt at that moment that she had an ability to work with children but the observations made by other students “planted a seed” into a possible ability that she could explore. This process of reflecting can be about a single topic or about reflecting about how to reflect—meta-reflecting. For several students who were interviewed, the general ability to become more reflective was influential for their clinical practice. Following are excerpts from interviews with students who took the equine course a year earlier:

WF14.6: I think that the reflective process is the key factor for me. And, um, I like to watch myself to know what I am doing and I think that this allowed that to kind of develop the process like “Wow!” you can really learn a lot from it, maybe I should start watching my tapes, you know, that kinda thing. I think that it brought more to the table or what I should be doing instead of how I am doing it now like add another like, another layer essentially, an abstract meta-perspective.

WF14.2: I have become more aware of like the little nuances of myself and I do constantly use like some of the activities that we did, those are like metaphors for the way people do relate with each other, so like for example in one of the activities where we tried to push the horse, and they kinda push against the other

way, and you wouldn't expect it, that is so metaphorical for how I see clients with certain things when you are pushing them too hard and they go the other way. I notice a lot where I am seeing behavioral patterns with clients that I learned from the horses.

WF14.1: I have benefitted tremendously. I think that having that experience. There are many other schools that I had looked into and they didn't have this unique program about working with horses and also relating the therapeutic process to it and I think that that has been very, very beneficial for me and so when I think about working with clients now I think about how that would look like if I work with the horses. And I think that right now working with victims of rape I always think about what would that look like if I worked with the horses, so I am always reflecting on it. It's like another model that I can reflect on. So that's been how it has been beneficial to me.

WF14.4: Like nowadays being mindful, being aware. Back then it was probably being more patient and being more just ok with just being rather than it has to be this way or it's better to be this way. Instead you can just be and that is ok too. And there is a lot to talk about with just being. You don't have to necessarily be talking about this or working towards that so I think I learned and took with me a lot of that and it's ok to just be and it's ok to just observe, its great to be curious about a number of other things. So those were highlights that have probably trickled through and stayed with me and have been highlighted in different ways now that I have had different experiences since then of course but they definitely came with me and they are not the same thoughts or ideas I probably took out of

the class when I first left but they are definitely still a part of me in some way. So the things that I have learned since then it's all shaped into who I am now. So yeah, it definitely is a part of me now as a therapist, as a person.

These students related being able to reflect more on their individual process through the conversations that took place in class. An important point that the last student made was in the statement "definitely is a part of me now as a therapist, as a person." This statement translates into the reflection that that students began making in regards to themselves as therapists.

Self of the Therapist

The coding of self of the therapist was based on the comments made by the students during their class discussion, as well as how the students answered the self of the therapist question during their individual interview. During the class discussions, this was a topic that kept coming up when the students reflected on how their way of being and/or personality played a role on how they delivered therapy. Taking from Aponte's (1994) definition of self of the therapist, this sub-theme encompassed the way in which the students relate their personal issues with how they do therapy (Aponte, 1994; Timm and Blow, 1999). For this analysis, I included excerpts from when the student used the phrase "self of the therapist" and/or if the personal development influenced something that they did clinically or with clients. One of the noticeable elements of clinical awareness that students took with them after being with the horses was how to be present and take in what is in the here and now. Students reported not thinking about deadlines, or problems outside of school but rather enjoying their time being outside in nature with the horses. One of the comments that related both of these concepts was from an equine

specialist who made the observation that horses “Don’t hold grudges. They live moment to moment and go back to being horses.” This seemed to resonate with the students because they were able to put themselves in that frame of mind during the equine course. Following are excerpts from interviews with students who related to this idea about “being still” and their clinical work a year after taking the course:

WF14.1: So there was one specific video that stands out where I didn’t remember the horse approached me that many times but when I saw the video I realized that I am an approachable person and I guess that I am likeable in many ways, and so when working with clients I have to remember that how I represent myself and who I am is enough for the clients and that I don’t have to overcompensate through thinking of the perfect question, or making them feel over validated or understood. You know? I don’t have to work that hard and just be me and the rest will happen. So that video specifically taught me that. And, personally I think that after that semester, it helped me get to the next phase of healing in my life and opening up in my life and therapeutic wise, I think that its just trusting the process, and approaching the clients in a very soft way, in the way that I would want to be approached if I am coming in vulnerable and just with stuff that I want to talk about but can sometimes be embarrassing to talk about and you kinda feel naked to talk about these things, so that was another thing. Being still and even setting boundaries in a therapeutic setting.

WF14.3: So at the time it was like, I understood something about myself that I never understood and I always felt like I just wasn’t good enough and that I wasn’t trying hard enough and if I could just do this or that, and then when I saw

that the action, that the trying was preventing me from being the presence that I had to offer that I didn't have to try and like that you can be just but just the self that I am without having to be something different was not a resource that was not accessible because of all the effort and it was like this incredible so it was like this thing that I have learned and now, it's like I think that I have moved to a point where I have different metaphors now and I am in touch with slightly different things, I have moved out of that phase and it no longer needs to be something that I think about.

WF14.6: I think about the self of the therapist and I feel like that is something else that they don't teach enough and it's certainly something that I think is integral to blossoming as an effective therapist. I think just knowing that an animal, an innocent prey animal, if they are willing to trust you, it makes you feel good in order to do good therapy. I think that one has to be confident and I think that that confidence plays across paradigms really. So as far as self of the therapist, that's always there. Who am I? And what does the horse think I am? And what do the clients think I am?

WF14.4: So prior to this, in the intro [Introduction to Equine Assisted Family Therapy] class I wasn't thinking too much about the mindfulness aspect of it but now I think that ties in a lot to self of the therapist and being able to reflect on your process but also like your process with you but then your process with everyone else because there is a lot of different settings. I mean we did activities where it was a group activity, we did individual activities and those can be a lot different. So being able to see those and kinda look at them from the bird's eye

view is nice. It give you a different perspective, and to me, the more perspective the better.

The students talked about how being outside with the horses allowed them to be present and realize that by being present they are bringing themselves more fully into the session. The students learned that their ability to be present was enough for the client and added effort or insightful questions were not always necessary for a successful therapy session. This is something that the students participating in the class discussions and students interviewed a year after taking the class, had not been aware of before. As stated before, the students who were interviewed were reflecting on their process a year later. However, students who were taking the course during the timeframe of this study were also able to make reflections regarding themselves as therapists and how they reflected their selves with clients.

The following conversation is from a class discussion between students on how to handle emotion when seeing clients. The first student made the disclaimer that this was her first term seeing clients at BTI. The conversation was centered around the concept that students feel that they give so much of themselves during the therapeutic session that they couldn't see themselves seeing clients back-to-back, as is the case for more experienced therapists. In this particular conversation, the student stated that one particular aspect she focuses on is when people say negative things about themselves and how the student tries to quickly reframe it. This lead to another student sharing about how she did not like for people to hand over Kleenex or talk to them when they are crying because they don't let the moment just be. The student ends the comment by translating similar moments to how they approach clients during their vulnerable

moments. In this case, the student took a personal awareness and preference and applied it to their behavior as therapists in a clinical setting.

WW15.8: Right now this is my first time in BTI I don't know how to do it back to back because it is so much like I give so much of myself and I don't know how I could do it.

WW15.5: What do you mean back to back?

WW15.8: Like see clients back to back, like I don't know how I could do it. I give so much of myself that I wouldn't be able to hold up...so a lot of times when people are talking to me and they are saying something negative about themselves I am quick to change it and reframe it instead of letting them be in that moment. And last night it happened where I was in the car with my girlfriend and I heard what she was saying and I recognized it and I stopped myself. So I didn't have to be the rescuer.

DSG: Right, you didn't have to fix it.

WW15.8: Yes!

WW15.4: WW15.8, I loved what you shared about allowing the emotions because I know that even myself, and I can cry easily if its an intense moment and if people comment and ask me if I am ok or want to give me a tissue it bugs me because I feel like I have to protect myself and then a wall comes up and I think about it a lot with clients and that if they get in that vulnerable position and if we are always making comments about that vulnerable position then we are not allowing them to be in that vulnerable position so I think that you brought up a really nice point that we just allow for the client to be in that vulnerable moment

and even if they are just sobbing and you know, so I think that its so vital because sometimes we have to go into those spaces and if the therapist is uncomfortable then the client is uncomfortable.

The conversation between these three students touched on several points, which included not having to “rescue” clients, allowing the process to unfold and how to be present when a client is in a vulnerable place. From the comments of the students interviewed regarding their self-awareness with the equine activities, the ability to “check themselves” influenced how the horses responded to them. These statements are similar to what student WW15.4, who was a current student in the equine course, shared regarding the emotional transfer that can happen between therapists and clients. In the class discussions and interviews, the topic of self of the therapist was addressed, with the only difference being that the students who were interviewed had been able to apply what they had previously learned about themselves during the equine class to their work in a therapy setting. The students in the class discussions were just becoming aware of the concept of the self of the therapist and assimilating it to their personal lives. Along with being present and aware of oneself in the therapy room, there are additional clinical skills that come to light through the equine activities.

Clinical Skills

In terms of clinical skills, the students in both sets of data talked about different clinical abilities and dexterities that they had discovered and/or expanded on during their participation in the equine activities. Of the different skills mentioned, the students repeatedly highlighted topics such as joining, building the therapeutic relationship and

thinking systemically. The follow excerpts demonstrate how the students made sense of these skills in a therapeutic setting.

Beginning with joining, this excerpt from a classroom discussion shows how one student struggled with getting the horse to accomplish a task. He or she attributed this lack of movement with not having joined with the horse beforehand.

WW15.3: Well I was thinking about this just a little bit ago, so it's interesting what she said about joining because WW15.7 and I both chose China because we haven't gotten to know her yet but we didn't take the time to get to know her. And we were just like reflecting on how important it is to join with your client in the therapy room if you want anything to happen because we didn't take the time to, we had already joined all of our time with Paris and we didn't take time to join with China and obviously you could see that nothing was working with us. Like we weren't able to get on the same page.

The student talked about how not being able to join with the horse made it impossible for the horse to accomplish the task and for the students to create any movement. Thinking about how students can practice joining, especially with someone that they have just met, can be a difficult thing to do. Joining is an abstract concept that is difficult to quantify and can only be experienced within each person, for example between the therapist and the client. Each person can experience the joining process differently and at different times. Nonetheless, it is a collaborative development that ideally takes place throughout the therapeutic process. Working with the horses, the students understood the difference in movement and accomplishing tasks when joining had taken place and when joining had been overlooked. The next excerpt is from an

interview with a student who explained how joining made sense to her when she worked with the horses:

WF14.6: I think that without a good joining there is nothing, so it's a trust, and I believe that the horses need to trust you, you need to trust the horse as well, and I can take that with me to the room without the horse being present and I can think back to my pictures and I can say that the seriousness of how I am and the sincerity and the genuine person that I know I am, and how I work with horses would be one in the same because I am very genuine in both contexts. The pictures helped me see what I am doing for the horse to react like that so if I take and I turn it inwards to the clinic, but I can almost watch myself, depending on what my clients are giving me, to know if I need to change something so that the appropriateness of the context which, I am sitting or how I am breathing to match their breathing, I think that that comes out clinically and I think that experience with the horses helped develop that.

The student who reflected on the definition that she had with the concept of joining was able to grasp a clearer idea of how she portrayed herself with clients when it came to joining. The student shared that the photographs helped enhance the view of herself as a sincere and honest person, and then she translated that into how she is in the therapy room with clients. Again, the experiential nature of the equine activities, matched with the photographs, was able to create a visual of her strength as a therapist. In the following excerpt, a student being interviewed related how joining and mirroring a client creates a connection in order for the therapy session to unfold:

WF14.4: I think again a lot of the collaborative nature. I think in the therapy room, it's a lot about connecting with my clients. Joining is a huge thing for me. So I think that it really shows probably how I am just as a person in a way which definitely translates to how I am as a therapist in the room which is a lot, to me, is a lot of focus around connecting with people and kinda just staying curious and trying out new things, just kinda seeing what the experience will bring. I never really felt like I went into many of the activities expecting anything or anticipating much just trying to go in there and try something and see what happens and I thought that was probably the best part about it. It made the experience that much more genuine and just enjoyable.

The student shared how staying curious and not having expectations when it came to the equine activities as well as in the therapy room allowed for more of a connection to take place between the client and herself. Furthermore, a student who also took the course a year ago added to the concept of this clinical skill towards generating movement with the horse:

WF14.6: So I think that working with the horses and Shelley [professor] says 'Go ahead and move the horse and take the lead and you know just walk her over there' well, that's great. What if she doesn't want to walk? So what are you supposed to do? You have a halter and lead, now what? You have the halter and the lead and you can't pull, I mean you can but the horse weighs I don't know how much and what about the days that she didn't have you put a lead, no, no, no, you can't touch the horse at all, well, what the hell are we supposed to do? It's the same thing with people. You can't put an invisible leash on them and expect

them even to do anything. So staying curious and staying open-minded. I think that I am a lot more curious and a lot more open-minded instead of expecting so this, that is really the biggest thing that equine did for me.”

The activity of leading a horse from one place to another can seem like a simple activity and probably not very hard to accomplish but in translating this skill into the therapy room where therapists want clients to accomplish a task, getting from one point to another can be really difficult. The next clinical skill mentioned in the transcriptions relates to how the equine activities helped the students think systemically. At times, I would help the student(s) recall what happened when the photograph was taken. More often than not, I would either remain quiet or at the end of the discussion of a particular photograph and/or video, would point out what I liked about it. In this following excerpt from a class discussion, I commented on the photograph in order to help the student recall what happened when the photograph was taken:

DG: I remember from this picture that you went for the foot that was already down and not the foot that was up.

W2F14.1: Oh, I didn't even notice that.

DSG: The right leg is up.

W2F14.1: Well that makes sense. Sometimes I get too focused and I see only what I want to see and not the bigger picture. So clinically I think that helps me see as a reminder to always step back and be systemic and think big versus just focusing on one tiny aspect. Which again I am just discovering that I do.

This moment in the equine activity had different meanings to every student. In this conversation the student overlooked a hoof that was already elevated and went for

the hoof that was planted. Although it was obvious to the other students who were observing the task that the hoof was elevated, the student that was doing the activity did not notice. It was the meaning that the student generated what made it impactful and significant for the student, as opposed to generating the meaning for her. Students drew parallels from this in regards to when it comes to giving clients advice. The following excerpt from a class discussion illustrates this point:

WW15.5: Yes, and she herself generated the meaning by observing the communication between the horse and her, so the meaning is hers.

DSG: Right, absolutely, and that's why we start with her when we look at these pictures. We start with the person who experienced it because the meaning is hers, as it should be. You know what you took from that.

DG: It's just like what we do equine therapy, the client's meaning is their meaning. We are not here to say it is or it is not, it is whatever is important and relevant to the client. Because I can come up with this wonderful metaphor and it won't stick because theirs was something completely different and that's what makes sense to them and that's ok. There is no right or wrong, there is no judgment, it just is.

WW15.4: But it's the same in the therapy room, the meaning is only significant to the person that it has meaning to. It doesn't even matter that the session has no meaning to me but maybe it has a lot of meaning to the client.

The ability of the students to create meaning between the equine activity and the therapeutic process is what brings clinical skills to life. Seeing how students all generated different meanings and shared it with each other, translated into how therapists

can allow clients to create what is meaningful for them. As the students began to create meaning with the equine activities, they also began to apply newfound clinical skills in the therapy room. The following section in the clinical development codes from the transcriptions talks about how the students began viewing therapy differently.

Viewing Therapy Differently

The following excerpts are from class discussions and interviews with students who related what they had learned from the equine activities to how they do therapy or how they view the therapeutic process. The first reflection is an excerpt from an interview:

WF14.2: I think that it did give me a different perspective to when I was there that day. So one thing I learned is that there is always multiple views and multiple realities but it does kinda slow me down and kinda make you take a second, and like “Well, it could be seen this way too and other people may see it this way too, or like instead.” So it made me consider more than just a multiple perspective because the pictures did that nicely... When I told you about pushing the horse and they go back. I absolutely love that I learned that you can’t get someone to do something if they are not ready to do it, you can’t push the horse if they are not ready. I have really taken that into consideration.

The student stated that participating in the equine activities and then viewing the photographs of her performing the equine activities allowed for her to understand the concept of multiple realities—how the same photograph can be viewed from different perspectives, each with its own meaning. The student also added pushing a client in a certain direction does not necessarily mean that it’s progress. The student was able to

assimilate this concept by relating to how difficult it can be to move the horse if the horse is not ready. Therefore, meeting a client where they are is part of the process. Another student interviewed speaks about learning this concept therapeutically:

WF14.3: It's changed who I am. I tried something a little different and I got immediate results. It was all related to the same process of the effort of being with and allowing the relationship to be what it is, instead of trying to make it be something that I could succeed.

What also stands out in this excerpt is the idea of trying something different and getting immediate results. This highlights the advantages that equine tasks have to make abstract concepts something tangible that students can work with. For example, in a class discussion, a student talked about working with a horse that was new to her, and not choosing to work with a horse whom she had worked with before. The student related this to how a therapist cannot pick which clients to work with. The following is an excerpt from the conversation:

WW15.1: For me this was the first time that I worked with China and it felt like meeting a client for the first time. It was also the first time that I noticed the class looking at me. Like in all the other activities it was just me and the horse but here I could feel everyone looking at me and I felt even more pressure to get the task done.

WW15.5: It looked like for me that you didn't want to work with China.

WW15.1: No, I didn't. I wanted to work with Paris but then I thought, "You don't get to pick your clients." And for me I wanted to give myself the opportunity to work with China even though I didn't want to.

As the student shared her perspective about working with a horse that she didn't necessarily want to work with, she related to the class how therapists cannot pick and chose clients. In these three excerpts, the students talked about specific therapeutic concepts where what they learned from the equine activities was applied to their clinical development. Many of these realizations came from the photographs that the students viewed and from the feedback that they received from their fellow classmates.

In between the two big themes of personal and clinical development, which came from the class discussions and interviews, students often experienced an incongruence between what they thought took place versus what actually took place. Although this is not a debate on reality versus social construction, students noticed that the photographs and/or video offered a different, sometimes eye opening perspective on what happened with the equine activities. In the following quote, a student interviewed talked about how the photographs and/or video helped experience the moment for a second time and in turn, created new meaning:

WF14.4: I guess, of the pictures and videos of myself stood out in a way, it was kinda like you got a second chance of experiencing it and but in a different way. Kinda of that bird's eye view of things so it really allowed me to experience it a second time and in a new way so I got to relate to it in new ways.

DG: So, what did seeing it a second time give you?

WF14.4: Probably more clarification on what I was thinking during the time. So like actually when the pictures or videos were being taken as well as an opportunity to probably reflect on the experience a little different so like when something would happened at a barn day we would have a chance to process and

everything right then and there but then seeing the videos and clips afterwards, probably allowed me to reflect on it slightly differently because I wasn't processing it in the moment and I was able to reflect on it. Probably being reflective. So I think that was the nice piece of the videos and the pictures kinda coming into play because it allowed us to then be able to observe ourselves. So we got to observe everyone else, we got to experience it ourselves and then on top of that we got to observe ourselves, which I think in turn, allowed us to experience it again in a different way.

DG: It sounds layered.

WF14.4: It was very layered! Yeah, I was going to say it was very well rounded.

Layered I think is a perfect word in the sense that it really gave you an opportunity to look at it from here, from here, from here and just a lot of different angles and to me that's what helps you get a better understanding and that's what's going to help you in life.

The student in this interview talked about having the ability to reflect more on her process as opposed to only the meaning created while doing the equine activity. This secondary reflection also influenced the student to continue to be reflective throughout her clinical development. The student now has the ability to create a bird's eye view of herself while doing therapy as well. Another student that was interviewed talked about how seeing the photographs and hearing the feedback also helped her to understand what her clinical supervisor was commenting on during practicum:

WF14.3: Later on when I was thinking about that I was in the practicum where a professor was giving me similar feedback that I was not getting and then when I

had that photograph, it became an image that... it showed me something that I hadn't seen about myself and I saw it in every aspect in my life like about how fucking hard I was trying to do all these different things and how counter that was and how it was making it impossible for so many of those things to really happen in terms of like a relationship that, um, so for me was this distortion when I went back and looked at the photograph I was like, "Oh my God that is not at all what I saw or what I remember" and so now I kinda have both photographs in my head but at that time it highlighted something for me that like other people in my life were trying to make me see and I couldn't see... and then that photograph became... it was like "Bing!" And I just remember kinda carrying it with me and like the journey that I have gone on in the last, you know a year later.

This statement from the student not only addresses that she was able to understand something that her supervisor had been commenting on, but this student had a visual of herself trying to make something happen and being physically uncomfortable during the process. This student realized that doing so was counter to the desired outcome and that this was playing out the same way in the student's personal life. The photograph also allowed for the student to take in what other people had been commenting and seeing about her throughout her "journey." Two other students who were interviewed reported similar statements regarding the advantage of seeing photographs and/or video of themselves working with the horses:

WF14.6: I think anytime that I watch myself working in any context, it really helps me to learn what not to do or to do better than next time. It's like watching our video here [BTI clinic], we learn "Oh yeah look at how my body posture

wasn't really matching the client and maybe I should do that." And you don't really know that cognitive process until you see a video or a picture going "Ah" because they speak a thousand words so it's a very, very reflective learning aspect of my training for me and in any area.

WF14.2: Because I think that when I reflected without the pictures on let's say the day of the activities, you have like all this periphery and everything that you think was going on too but then the picture just kinda like puts it in the moment for you and that's what I was really concentrating on and that's what I was really looking at. So, it brings you back to what was really important at that moment. Just about the actual experiential part, I think was such a huge reason for like what an impact it made because like you don't realize I guess when you are doing therapy and you think that experiential is just another form, but like it's therapy to the max because you are processing so much more in the moment, and then you are processing afterwards too about what was going on where I think is also where the pictures come in handy because you are processing again and meta processing... Meta-reflecting. Whatever, so like the experiential part of it was so huge and we don't get enough of that here and there is so many more places you can take it and learn from it.

Both of these students commented on how viewing photographs of themselves influenced the way they processed the equine activities and in turn how they could apply it to therapy. Whether it was to see if the therapist and client mirrored each other with body posture or staying present with their reflections that include the peripheral variables in the session, these students found that seeing themselves performing the equine

activities was valuable. For the students that were seeing their photographs for the first time in a classroom setting, the discussions also reported similar observations to that of the students who saw their photographs and/or video a year later. The following is an excerpt from a class discussion where the student talks about how the comments of other classmates and the photographs and/or video offered a different perspective from what the student believed happened:

WW15.7: I like looking at these pictures because you don't understand what is going on but its nice to look at the pictures you get to actually see, like see from another perspective after you are done with the activity and listen to people's perspectives about it. And sometimes like you think that you did a lot and you really didn't or vice versa. It's really nice.

Similar to the comments that the interviewed student made, this student talked about how the photographs and the other student's feedback/observations created a different perspective on what happened during that equine activity. The overall meanings that the students created were based on the metaphors and connections they gathered from their work with the equine activities. These were not suggested or given to the students by the professor, researcher or equine specialist—these were individual meanings. The photographs and/or video plus the feedback that the other students gave helped shape these individual meanings, and in turn, influenced the student's personal and clinical development.

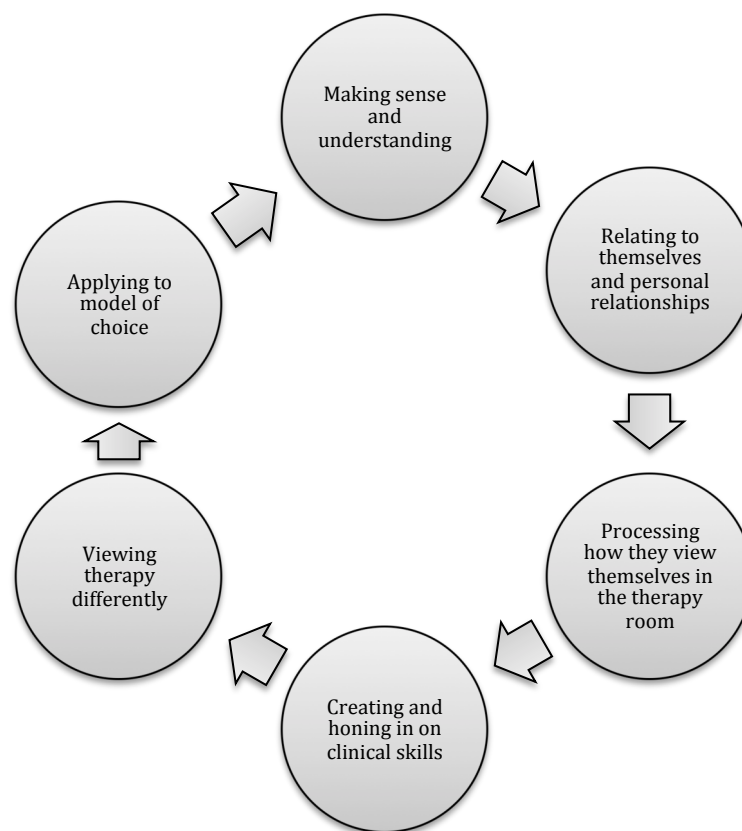
Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine if the equine activities that the students participated in played a role in the student's personal and clinical development. Results show that not only did the equine activities influence how the students viewed themselves and their work as therapists, but also viewing their photographs helped create a perspective of themselves that they had not been aware of before. These results were consistent between the classroom discussions that took place at the moment that the students were seeing their photographs and/or video for the first time, and also for the students who had taken the course a year before. Although personal and clinical development were stated as the main themes of this study, five subcategories emerged under those themes, which helped expand the themes and the depth in which the reflections of the equine activities affected each student. IPR helped the researcher successfully elicit what happened with the equine activities in the class, and more importantly, allowed for a processing and reflection of the shift that took place during the equine class.

It seems that the students who had taken the class a year before had the ability to put into practice their newfound awareness in their interpersonal relationships as well as in the therapeutic setting. The transcripts also illustrate how students who were actively seeing clients during the class discussion, as well as those who were interviewed a year after taking the course, were able to apply their new reflections and connections to how they did therapy. These changes were attributed to an awareness and reflection that took place during the equine activities. On the other hand, students who were taking the course currently were beginning to understand this newfound awareness and assimilating

in their lives as well. This process of making sense and understanding this new knowledge was the first effect that the students experienced. Afterward, the students began to relate it to themselves and their interpersonal relationships. Then the students begin to apply this new awareness to how they view themselves in the therapy room. These three steps are what the classroom discussions revolved around. The students interviewed had continued the reflection process and were now focused on honing in on their clinical skills, what they did in the therapy room, and how it could be applied to their model of choice. However, this is not a linear process but a recursive one, where the student is constantly processing and meta-processing after being exposed to viewing themselves through photographs and/or video.

Figure 2. Reflective process of students in the equine course



In the next chapter, the reader will examine the implications of this study, discuss the limitations of the methodology, and examine contributions made to the field. Finally, the chapter will explore future directions for research in the area of study included in the dissertation.

CHAPTER V: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this study was to use grounded theory in order to determine if there was any personal and/or clinical development occurring with the students who took the Introduction to Equine Assisted Family Therapy course. Given that there is limited research in the area of equine therapy, particularly related to the training of therapists, the goal of using grounded theory was to develop a theory that was not otherwise available to “explain and understand the process” (Creswell, 2013, p. 88) of how equine therapy affects, if at all, the personal and clinical development of the students who participated in the course. The data was collected from two terms of classroom discussions and individual interviews with students who had taken the course a year earlier. The analysis of the transcriptions showed that students underwent personal development in their lives, gained awareness of their strengths and newfound traits, and well as changes within their interpersonal relationships. Also, the results showed that the students reported development and changes in the way they perceived themselves as therapists, their clinical skills and how they viewed therapy differently.

Discussion

The analysis of the transcriptions showed personal and clinical development through the comments and observations that the students made of their photographs and/or video. Moreover, the students who had taken the course a year ago reflected on their personal and clinical development since that time. However, there were two significant differences between the types of reflections that were congruent with the two sets of data, the class discussions and the interviews.

When the students from the class discussions were first presented with photographs and/or video of themselves performing the equine activities, the reflection was self-examining, where the students created an awareness of different aspects of themselves, as well as application of this awareness in their interpersonal relationships. From the transcriptions of the interviews, the data revealed that the students' application of their awareness was organized along the following sub-themes: Personal Development (in a clinical context), Self of the Therapist, Clinical Skills, and Viewing Therapy. According to Timm and Blow (1999), "The more secure therapists are with their own issues, the more they can focus on the issues of their clients" (p. 336). In this case, it made sense that the students in the class discussions were focusing on their own issues and the students who were interviewed a year later were focused on how their own issues affected their work as therapists.

As predicted, personal and clinical development was shown through the comments of the students but how they experienced it was not uniform. That is, every student experienced it at different times during the course and even a year later. This process of reflection was not a linear or progressive one, but rather a recursive method where students were constantly self-reflecting and moving onto clinical reflection. This recursive reflection process was identified between the class discussions and the interviews. This recursive process also implies that time did not affect the impact of the reflections for the students, but rather allowed for the students to explore their newfound personal and clinical development in their lives and therapy room.

Interestingly, these newfound personal and clinical developments were positive ones where each student encouraged the other through feedback in a respectful manner.

Instead of pointing out what the student lacked, students discussed with each other undiscovered strengths and resources. According to Timm and Blow (1999), viewing the issues regarding self of the therapist was not always positive and instead were seen as “red flags” (p. 332). Furthermore, Timm and Blow (1999) state that:

A pathology approach to supervision might lead the supervisor of the above therapist to ask the following questions: What unresolved issues do you have around your mother's alcoholism? How might your own alcoholic family experiences interfere with successful therapy? These questions are important in helping the therapist to not allow personal issues get in the way of effective therapy with this family. However, there are other questions to consider which are equally important. These questions, in our experience, are asked far less frequently than the above questions. These are questions that have a resource focus. (p. 332)

This resource focus is the view of the self of the therapist where the student is encouraged to observe how their abilities can be shifted to strengths in the therapy room. Aponte (1996) created a model for training clinicians called “Person-of-the-Therapist” (POTT) model.” For this model, Simon (2006) summarizes the essential elements of the training of Aponte’s POTT as “(a) mastery of self (self-knowledge with self-command), (b) access to the self (memories, emotions, and values), and (c) the ability to actively and purposefully choose how to use self therapeutically in a therapist–client relationship” (p. 397). These three elements of the POTT represent the recursive process that I referenced when I spoke of the reflections that the students had when they experience the equine course. The difference between the POTT and the theory that I proposed is that through

the experiential nature of the equine activities, the students were able to put these elements into practice. The equine course offered students the experiential opportunity to incorporate their experiences into their personal and professional development. “As we continue to recognize the importance of the development of the self of the therapist, we are finding ways to integrate both the personal and professional training methods” (Deacon, 1996, p. 184). Just like equine therapy is an alternative method for therapy for clients, equine therapy can also offer an alternative method for students to develop their personal and clinical awareness (Simon, 2006). In order to better understand the overall results of this study, the limitations of this study will be discussed. The contribution to the field of family therapy and future directions for this research will be proposed.

Limitations of the Study

This study illustrated how equine activities provided personal and clinical development to the students who took the Introduction to Equine Assisted Family Therapy course. However, there were some limitations to this study that should be considered regarding the results of the analysis.

First, the students who participated in the study were students who were taking or have taken the equine course. Although the sample was biased because of the overwhelming positive statements and the fact that the course is an elective and not a required course, there was only one student that was not interested in being interviewed. This data from this student would have been invaluable to understanding how the course perhaps did not influence or cause an impact in her personal and/or clinical development.

Additionally, the sample of students in the classroom discussions and interviews was small. The classroom discussion had a total of 14 students, but not all students were

present during all discussions, which left out data from their reflections of their photographs and /or video. Photographs and/or video of the students who were absent that day of class were skipped over and did not become part of the class discussion. Therefore, at times there was less reflection on the class experience. Also, of the students who took the course a year earlier, five responded to be interviewed. According to Creswell (2013) this is a small sample for grounded theory, “The point is to gather enough information to fully develop (or *saturate*) the model. This may involve 20 to 60 interviews” (Creswell, 2013, p. 89). Between the interviews and the class discussions, eleven pieces of data were collected. In order to increase the sample, I could have also audio recorded the discussions after the students performed the activities at the barn. This could have also added data regarding the immediate impressions of the equine activities, rather than the reflection of the student a week later.

Moreover, there was only one male that participated in the study, in part due to the large percentage of females in the Marriage and Family Therapy program. This is a limitation because the male experience, voice and perspective were not explored and could have added a different viewpoint to the equine course.

Second, students (or clients for that matter) may have different reasons why equine therapy may not be an option for them to experience or partake in. Some people may have had traumatic injuries or fears from interacting with horses in the past. Others may have allergies, which doesn’t allow them to be near horses, or other types of animals. Although I took the course to get over my fear and some students reported getting over their fear of horses during the course, this may not be the case for everyone. It is important to state that most of the students who took the course identify themselves

as “animal lovers” and liked being near horses, which likely predisposes them to have a positive experience in the class.

Third, according to strict IPR methodology, the students are shown their photographs and/or video 24-48 hours after the activity (Cashwell, 1994). In this case, the pilot study yielded that students could reflect a week after participating the equine activities. For the fifth class discussion, the students had done equine activities for three weeks in a row and had not had a chance to return to the classroom to process it. Therefore, the students were shown media from three different weeks of equine activities. This caused some of the students to state that they had trouble recalling the activity and/or what they were feeling/thinking during that time:

WW15.4: “To be honest, I can’t remember anything about that day but I like to touch the horses! So I can’t make any comment. I am sorry.”

Consequently, the analysis of the first two barn days was not as rich as the equine activities that had been performed a week earlier. For future research, it will be best to schedule the equine activities and the classroom discussions a week apart from each other.

Fourth, students seemed to prefer photographs to video and this was determined from the amount of reflections that the students made. When photographs were shown, the students were able to talk about the different perspectives of the photographs, including shadows and body postures. When students saw videos, they commented less and stated that it was more of a re-creation of what happened instead of something that they hadn’t notice before. One student who was interviewed stated:

WF14.3: I always so much preferred the photos because it was capturing these moments in this way that gave drama to the moment and it was like in this single image, so much more could be said instead of like a video where it's like "here is a copy of what is said."

Larsen et al. (2008) talks about the video recording used in IPR as a useful form to recall experiences during the practice of a particular skill. However, there is a lack of data that compares video and photographs in relation to IPR and whether one is more useful than the other. Therefore, perhaps the analysis could have been done with all of the media being photographs instead of videos in order to enrich the reflections.

Finally, researcher bias could have provided another limitation for the study. For this study, I took the photographs, conducted the interviews, and transcribed and coded the data. Therefore, there is the possibility that I may have influenced the results of this theory. Aware of this possibility, I took measures to minimize researcher bias. For example, during the classroom discussions I did not ask questions in a manner that influenced the reflections or prompted the students to talk about any personal and clinical development. Also, I kept a journal to log how I decided to take a certain photograph or my thoughts on choosing which photograph to use for the PowerPoint, which was used throughout the study process. I noticed that I was taking photographs in a more mindful way by placing myself in different angles around the student and horse, in order to view the equine activity through diverse perspectives. I also noticed that I took and picked photographs that had the center focus on the horse and student doing the activity.

Moreover, I also became aware that many of the photographs I chose to show to students,

demonstrated movement either from the horse's tail, the student's body, and/or the moment in which the student is performing an equine activity.

Contributions to the Field

There were several contributions that this study offers to the equine and family therapy world in general, and to the equine course sequence at NSU specifically. Starting with the equine course, in some of the class discussions and interviews, the students made comments and gave feedback on what they preferred to have more of for the equine course. Students stated that they liked keeping the class small because the processing of the media was more intimate. Although the course only allows for a maximum of 12 students, having five or ten students did not affect the quality of the reflections. Also, one student commented on how the class was setup between classroom discussions and days at the barn working with horses:

WF14.4: So we got to just observe the horses to start, then we got to just be with the horses, then we got to do something with the horses, then we got to do even more with the horses and it kinda led to a point where we were kinda doing with the horses but it was really a lot of doing for me. So, whether it was just being able to reflect on my process, how I feel about things, whether it was to just connect in a new and different way, whether it was with a horse, with a colleague, um, I processed a lot. Probably more so in that class than in any other class. Particularly in that term. I enjoyed how it was set up. I liked being able to come back to class and being able to process what had gone on at the barn. I liked being out at the barn and watching everyone and being to observe each person. I think that can be just as meaningful as experiencing it yourself.

The student states that how the activities with the horses that were planned and “set up,” combined with days in the classroom to process the days at the barn, were helpful for the students to process their experience. It seemed that for this student, the class not only taught him or her about equine therapy but also introduced the purpose and results of self-reflection. At NSU, the BTI clinic offers students the opportunity to video record their clinical sessions for supervision and learning purposes. However, not all students take advantage of this opportunity. All of the students interviewed mentioned that their experience of watching their photographs and videos in the course was like watching their client videos, and that most of them thought they would start doing so. Therefore, this class provided experiences other than literature regarding pet and equine therapy for the students; it offered them the ability to explore other available methods for self-awareness.

Furthermore, the students also commented on the professor and how she added to the experience of the course. Two students stated she gave a “very soothing feel to the experience” and the other stated:

WF14.1: Allowing that flexibility, which allowed us the flexibility to have those experiences because if you were directing our process a bit more of telling us about what that meant, I don’t know if I would have come to all those realizations that I did come to so I just really appreciate the flexibility that Dr. Green [professor of the course] had, allowing us to savor our process and make meaning out of these experiences that we had and to create whatever narratives we wanted to create about them. So that’s the biggest takeaway for me.

There is something to be said about this facilitator and future facilitators of this course. By remaining isomorphic to how an equine session would be conducted, the professor taught the course without predetermining meanings for the students, and allowing the process to unfold with the equine activities. Aponte and Carlsen (2009) emphasize this point by stating:

We strongly believe that self-of-the-therapist work requires supervisors and group members to provide feedback in a manner that is reflective and collaborative as opposed to something that is hierarchical or "expert-like." When anyone attempts to become the expert on the therapist's life experiences, a negative and unhelpful experience may result. The person doing the work has complete freedom to accept or reject any feedback. (p. 342)

Finally, based on the two terms in which class discussion data was taken, it seems that perhaps including the Equine specialists in the class discussions can also enhance the feedback because they can provide specific, observable horse behavior that can be added into the meaning created by the student(s). For the fourth classroom discussion, an equine specialist who had been part of the equine activities with the students was present for the reflection of the photographs and video. The following is an excerpt of a conversation between the student reflecting, the equine specialist (ES) and the professor of the class:

DSG: It seems like a very respectful way to pet her and she seems so content with her.

ES: And interestingly enough there are two people standing on either side of her, and standing relatively in front of her and she is still good with it.

DSG: She is so good with it that she keeps her eyes closed.

WW15.9: Yeah! I put “So relaxed in the presence of four uber predators.”

ES: There you go.

WW15.9: And alert but she hears and...

WW15.7: Her ears are towards her back. I guess that in a therapy session, um like you don’t want to approach a client like “Hey what’s the problem?!” You kinda want to slip it in so you want to ease into it and make them feel relaxed and comfortable because you said earlier, that clients once they are comfortable they get vulnerable, so and Paris is... so it makes sense. I make sense of that.

DSG: It looks almost like the team. So WW15.4 is the therapist and you guys are the team and everybody has made Paris feel very safe or she wouldn’t be standing there if she didn’t. Paris has both on her hoofs planted and she looks content.

In this segment taken from the class discussion transcript, the input of the equine specialist stated that the horse was comfortable having two students standing on either side of it. By adding this specific observation of the horse’s behavior, the students are able to open up the discussion to how they can approach a client without causing him or her alarm. The horse becomes a representation of a potential client, and the students become aware of how they can make a client feel safe.

In more general terms, the attempt of this study to contribute to the field of equine therapy and family therapy has been to finally document data on how this type of work has an impact on the training of students, in more than just one case example. Much of the literature regarding equine therapy either has to do with rehabilitative and riding therapy, or horsemanship skills. From this literature, the data is restricted to single case

studies and/or the immediate effect of the equine therapy. This study shed light on a different type of equine therapy. This type of equine therapy takes brief, systemic and strength-based concepts from the family therapy field and apply them to individuals, couples and families who work with horses as part of their therapy. Furthermore, this study not only addressed the immediate effects of the equine activities but also included what happens a year later, adding the longitudinal aspect of the effects with the students.

This study illustrated how much growth the students experienced after taking the equine therapy course. Students reflected not only on themselves but how they are as therapists in the therapy room and with clients. Many of the conversations and reflections were about clinical skills such as joining, introducing change and inviting the client to do something different. This course not only teaches about equine therapy but also has the potential to be a method of supervision and a supervisory course. Students work through difficult cases, become aware of what they bring to a therapeutic session, and work on their micro skills as therapists (Aponte & Carlsen, 2009; Bachelor & Horvath, 1998; Timm & Blow, 1999). This form of supervision, whether done in a group or individually, does not change the supervisory process. That is, the students were able to share their struggles and strengths in an open arena rather than inside a room with florescent lights and confined space. Making this course a required class rather than an elective, whether for the student's clinical development or as a supervision course, could enhance the personal and clinical development of students before, during and after seeing clients.

Future Directions for Research

The first advanced equine assisted family therapy course, which was offered at NSU, comprised of seven students who had previously taken the introductory course. The main focus of the course had been the practice of mindfulness and utilization, focusing on how to run equine therapy sessions with different populations. Data has not been gathered from this course but doing so could show what other developments have taken place after the course ends.

More research could also be gathered regarding how seeing other students' photographs influence each student's personal and clinical development. Bert Hellinger (2009) states that all who participate in the developmental process of another are just as transformed as the person that has the experience. For example, a teacher also learns as he or she teaches the subject matter. Therefore, learning about this process with the students could add to the transformative nature of the work.

In terms of culture, more research can be explored to determine how equine activities are viewed from different backgrounds and ethnicities. Some cultures view horses as food, others as a simple work animal, and others just as a means of transportation. It would be interesting to explore how these different definitions of horses affect, if at all, the equine work. The same can be said for different social classes. Additionally, gender can also play a role in the perspective and output from the equine activities. As stated previously, there was only one male participant and the distinction in terms of gender was not a focus of this study. Further research can be done to investigate whether gender changes the experience and perspective with the equine activities.

The “common factors” discussed in the Blow et al., (2007) article were often the topic of conversation within the reflections of the students. Most of the students did not talk about their model of choice but rather what they brought of themselves to the therapeutic encounter with a client. By stimulating this type of reflection, students began to become aware that they were the key ingredients in the therapy room, not the model. Therefore, topics like joining, therapeutic relationship, clinical skills, listening and allowing the process to unfold without offering advice, were being explored, experienced and refined (Bachelor & Horvath, 1998).

Additionally, Aponte and Carlsen (2009) talk about developing the self of the therapist in order to become a more effectual clinician. Aponte and Carlsen (2009) specifically state:

The emphasis is on developing the person in the role of therapist to become a more effective clinician both in how he or she engages a client in a therapeutic relationship, and how he or she employs the technical tools of therapy. This point can be made more overt as the focus of the equine course for the future. (p. 397)

By making the focus of the course more overt, one could study whether the clinical effectiveness of the students has changed and if the clients have noticed something different. Moreover, the students can learn about their personal and clinical emerging themes, and describe how their developments influence their clinical work.

The results of this study demonstrate the importance of this course for the personal and clinical development of the students enrolled in the course. Although I wanted to report all of the hundreds of pages of transcripts, only the most concise and significant quotes were used. It was overwhelming to see how students qualitatively

changed from the first day of class to the final week of the term. Students not only understood the theory and premise of the equine work, but they were equally transformed within themselves.

Students learned the benefits of self-reflection and awareness, especially when it came to becoming a therapist. The photographs and videos that were shown in class of the students performing the activities are not what produced these results but rather served as a catalyst for discussions while processing the equine activities. The true transformative nature came from participating in the equine activities with the horse.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview

1. What stood out for you after seeing the pictures and/or video a year ago?
2. What was it about the picture and/or video that made it stand out?
3. Is there a particular picture and/or video that stands out for you after taking the equine class?
4. What kinds of changes have you noticed since you saw the video/picture?
5. In what ways have the pictures and/or videos related to how you do therapy?
6. In what ways have the pictures and/or videos related to your clinical skills?
7. In what ways have the pictures and/or videos related to the self of the therapist?
8. Have the equine activities had an impact on your personal development?
9. How, if at all, do you use the experiences that you had with the equine activities in your day-to-day life?
10. How have you benefitted, if at all, from your experience with the equine activities?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to share or talk about that I didn't ask?

Appendix B

Informed Consent for Class Discussions

Consent Form of Participation in the Research Study Entitled *Interpersonal Process Recall: An Equine Assisted Approach to Training Family Therapy Students*

Funding Source: None

IRB Proposal #: 07281418Exp

Principal Investigator
Shelley Green, Ph.D., LMFT
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561-287-0657

For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:
Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790
IRB@nsu.nova.edu

What is the study about?

You are invited to participate in a research study. This study seeks to determine the impact of experiential, equine assisted activities in training family therapy students to become more self-reflective, and to examine and challenge their typical ways of developing therapeutic relationships, including building trust and rapport, creating change, and supporting clients in vulnerable situations.

Why are you asking me?

We are inviting you to participate because you meet the following criteria: Participants will be master's and doctoral students enrolled in the Introduction to Equine Assisted Family Therapy and Advanced Equine Assisted Family Therapy courses in the Family Therapy Program at NSU.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?

After the consent has been secured, the students will be participating in equine activities that are part of the ongoing experiential aspect of the Equine class. During the performance of such activities, pictures and video will be taken of the students. These videos and pictures will be uploaded to a power point presentation where each slide will contain a picture of a student or group of students participating in the equine activities. The following week, these power point slides will be shown to the students during the equine class. Students will then comment on what they see in each of the pictures, including their own. "Because IPR can be a lengthy process, 'choosing the most

interpersonally weighted or most metaphorically meaningful segment of tape will be most productive” (Bernard and Goodyear, 2004, p. 220). These comments will be recorded using an audio recording device. After the comments have concluded, the audiotape will be transcribed and statements made by the students will be used as data. The maximum time commitment of the students will be three hours.

For the students that wish to not participate in the review of the videos or picture, or wish to not include their pictures in the PowerPoint, their grades will not be affected either in terms of their participation grade or overall course grade. Although the pictures will be taken of all the students, they will not become a part of the class discussion or included in the PowerPoint if students do not wish to participate.

Is there any audio or video recording?

This research project will include audio recording and video recording. The audio/video recording will take place while you are doing the equine activities and pictures will be taken as well. During the class discussions, an audio recording will be made using a recorder. A selected number of pictures and/or video will be added to a PowerPoint to show in class. The discussions in class will be transcribed. Because your voice (or your image and your voice) will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears (or hears and sees) the recording, your confidentiality for things you say (or do) on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described in this paragraph.

What are the dangers to me?

If you wish to not participate now or at any point during the term, your grade for the class, including the participation grade will not be affected, either positively or negatively. The procedures or activities in this study may have unknown or unforeseeable risks. If you have any questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact Dr. Shelley Green and Diana Giraldez. You may also contact the IRB at the numbers indicated above with questions as to your research rights.

One of the primary goals of the course is to enhance student therapist’s level of self-reflection and ability to conceptualize and define their participation in therapeutic relationships with clients. Through equine assisted activities, students are expected to gain self-awareness, as well as the skills to examine and evaluate the effectiveness of their therapeutic approach. These equine activities whether it involves one student or a group of students, creates an interaction not only with the horse(s) but also with each other about what they are noticing (Masini, 2010). This experiential course offers a unique format for providing this kind of training and awareness, and the specific activities to be examined in this study will be a part of the ongoing curriculum for the course.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information private?

Your photo and video will be shown unless you restrict the use of such material. During the class discussions of the pictures and video, the conversation will only be audio recorded and not video recorded. The transcribed pieces will be only of what is said and not about who said it. If names are mentioned, they will be given pseudonyms to protect the person's identity. Also, since you are participating in a conversation with the class, confidentiality terms within the group will remain and any information you wish to disclose about yourself is up to you. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The IRB, regulatory agencies, Dr. Shelley Green or Diana Giraldez may review research records. The data will be stored to ensure security and confidentiality for 36 months.

What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?

You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty in your grade for participation or overall course grade. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study but you may request that it not be used.

Other Considerations:

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you by the investigators.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing below, you indicate that

- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related injury
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
- you voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled *Interpersonal Process Recall: An Equine Assisted Approach to Training Family Therapy Students*

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Informed Consent for Interviews

Consent Form of Participation in the Research Study Entitled *Interpersonal Process Recall: An Equine Assisted Approach to Training Family Therapy Students*

Funding Source: None

IRB Proposal #: 07281418Exp

Principal Investigator
Shelley Green, Ph.D., LMFT
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Co-Investigator
Diana Giraldez, M.S.
561-287-0657

For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:
Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790
IRB@nsu.nova.edu

What is the study about?

You are invited to participate in a research study. This study seeks to determine the impact of experiential, equine assisted activities in training family therapy students to become more self-reflective, and to examine and challenge their typical ways of developing therapeutic relationships, including building trust and rapport, creating change, and supporting clients in vulnerable situations.

Why are you asking me?

We are inviting you to participate because you meet the following criteria: Participants will be master's and doctoral students who have been previously enrolled in the Introduction to Equine Assisted Family Therapy and Advanced Equine Assisted Family Therapy courses in the Family Therapy Program at NSU.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?

After the consent has been secured, the students will be participating in equine activities that are part of the ongoing experiential aspect of the Equine class. As a participant you will be interviewed using a semi-structured interview consisting of 11 (eleven) questions, individually and in a private room. During the interview, these comments will be recorded using an audio recording device. After the comments have concluded, the audiotape will be transcribed and statements made by the students will be used as data. The maximum time commitment of the students will be of approximately 45 minutes, depending on the length of your answers.

For the students that wish to not participate, their grades will not be affected either in terms of their participation grade or overall course grade.

Is there any audio or video recording?

This research project will include audio recording. The audio recording will take place while you are being interviewed in a private room. The discussions will be transcribed. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say (or do) on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described in this paragraph.

What are the dangers to me?

If you wish to not participate now or at any point during the term, your grade for the class, including the participation grade will not be affected, either positively or negatively. The procedures or activities in this study may have unknown or unforeseeable risks. If you have any questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact Dr. Shelley Green and Diana Giraldez. You may also contact the IRB at the numbers indicated above with questions as to your research rights.

One of the primary goals of the course is to enhance student therapist's level of self-reflection and ability to conceptualize and define their participation in therapeutic relationships with clients. Through equine assisted activities, students are expected to gain self-awareness, as well as the skills to examine and evaluate the effectiveness of their therapeutic approach. These equine activities whether it involves one student or a group of students, creates an interaction not only with the horse(s) but also with each other about what they are noticing (Masini, 2010). This experiential course offers a unique format for providing this kind of training and awareness, and the specific activities to be examined in this study will be a part of the ongoing curriculum for the course.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information private?

Your audio-recorded interview will be kept under the security of the co-researcher and under password. The transcribed pieces will be only of what is said and not about who said it. If names are mentioned, they will be given codes to protect the person's identity. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The IRB, regulatory agencies, Dr. Shelley Green or Diana Giraldez may review research records. The data will be stored to ensure security and confidentiality for 36 months.

What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?

You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty in your grade for participation or overall course grade. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study but you may request that it not be used.

Other Considerations:

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you by the investigators.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing below, you indicate that

- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related injury
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
- you voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled *Interpersonal Process Recall: An Equine Assisted Approach to Training Family Therapy Students*

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

Biographical Sketch

Diana I. Giraldez Carter was born in San Gil, Santander, Colombia. She was adopted at four months of age and was raised in Panama City, Republic of Panama, where she went to a private school and graduated with an IB Diploma. In Panama, she attended college and became a Licensed Psychologist, and obtained a minor in Law and Political Science. She interned at a Children's SOS Village running groups with children who suffered sexual abuse. She also interned at a government run Family institution, helping children and parents with the reunification process. The last internship was at a public school conducting aptitude tests for juniors and seniors. It was in the last term of the psychology program where she came across family therapy and systemic thinking.

Looking up "Family therapy" on Google, she came across Nova Southeastern University (NSU) and its Family Therapy Master's program. She moved to Florida to pursue her Master's degree. During those two years, she took every elective available and graduated with a concentration in Family Systems Health Care. She interned in the Broward school system participating in an anti-bullying program and doing individual/group therapy with middle school students. She also interned with VITAS hospice providing grief and family counseling with the patients and their families. Salvador Minuchin supervised Diana for structural therapy application in clinical cases.

After learning about systemic therapy and the traditionally associated therapeutic models in her Masters Program in Family Therapy, Diana was ambivalent about whether to pursue a Ph.D. in Family Therapy. She now considers this to have been, one of the best decision of her life, as it led to her enrollment in the Equine Assisted Family Therapy course in her first term. She quickly became immersed in the work and became

a Teaching Assistant for the following three years. She also became a part of Stable Place, Inc., a non-profit organization that provides equine assisted therapy on a sliding scale fee to individuals, families, couples and groups. During this time she also started working with Spanish speaking clients at the Brief Therapy Institute (BTI) at NSU.

Presently Diana is a therapist at Stable Place, Inc. running substance abuse groups and mood disorder groups, and seeing individuals, families and couples, primarily Spanish speaking, in equine therapy.