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Exploring the Professional Development of MFT Students Enrolled in Equine Assisted Family Therapy Coursework: An Experiential Learning Modality

Natalie Rothman

Nova Southeastern University, nrothmanlmhc@gmail.com

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Exploring the Professional Development of MFT Students Enrolled in Equine Assisted
Family Therapy Coursework: An Experiential Learning Modality

by

Natalie Rothman

A Dissertation Presented to the
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Nova Southeastern University

2020

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Natalie Rothman

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Pages
Acknowledgments.....	i
List of Tables	xi
List of Figures.....	xii
Abstract.....	xiii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
Equine Assisted Relational Learning.....	2
Using Animals Therapeutically	4
Equines and Psychotherapy	5
Professional Development	7
Rationale of Study.....	8
Position of the Researcher	8
Summary.....	9
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	11
Animal Assisted Therapy.....	11
Brief History	11
Definitions and differences	13
Horses and Therapy	15
Horses and Psychotherapy: the Connection.....	18
Equine Assisted Psychotherapy	19
Theoretical Underpinnings of EAP.....	20
Theoretical Underpinnings of EAFT	22

Experiential Learning.....	24
Research in EAP	26
Equine Assisted Learning (EAL).....	27
Research in EAL.....	28
EAFT Courses at NSU.....	31
Current Supervision of MFTs.....	33
Professional Development	36
Professional Organizations	37
Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship Intl.....	37
Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association	38
Association of Marriage and Family Therapy	39
Summary.....	41
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	42
Qualitative Research.....	42
Phenomenological Qualitative Research	44
Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis	45
Phenomenology.....	46
Hermeneutics	46
Hermeneutic Circle.....	48
Ideography	48
Summary of IPA	49
Participants.....	49
Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria	49

Participant Recruitment	50
Data Collection	51
Semi Structured Interview	52
Interview Questions	52
Data Preparation.....	54
Data Analysis	55
Step 1: Reading and Rereading.....	56
Step 2: Initial Noting.....	56
Step 3: Developing Emergent Themes	57
Step 4: Searching for Connections Across Emergent Themes	57
Step 5: Moving to the Next Case	57
Step 6: Looking for Patterns Across Cases.....	58
Trustworthiness.....	58
Ethical Considerations	59
Self of the Researcher	61
Summary.....	61
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS	63
Quirkos.....	63
IPA Connection.....	65
Presentation of Themes and Analysis.....	66
Relational Threads	67
Executive Skills	67
Relational Responses	67

Be in the moment, Be Present.....	69
Professional Skills.....	71
Professional Development	71
Personal Development	75
Beliefs about Professional Identity Development.....	81
Learning Through Reflection.....	83
Conceptual Skills	83
Conceptualization	83
Incorporating Theory	85
Perceptual Skills.....	87
Data Interpretation	87
Evaluative Skills	90
Self-Assessment.....	90
Experiential Nature	93
Summary	94
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS	96
Discussion.....	97
Strengths of the Study.....	102
Limitations of the Study.....	105
Implications of Study	107
Graduate Level MFT Students.....	107
Field of Family Therapy	108
Suggestions for Future Research	109

Concluding Thoughts.....	110
References.....	112
Appendices.....	125
Appendix A: Informed Consent.....	126
Appendix B: IPA Data Set.....	131
Biographical Sketch.....	209

List of Tables

Table 1. <i>Master Themes, Sub-Themes, and Connectivity</i>	66
Table 2. <i>Sample of IPA Data Set</i>	98

List of Figures

Figure 1: <i>Quirkos graphical interface with analysis represented by bubbles</i>	64
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Abstract

Equine assisted activities have been utilized in various manners with multiple populations in therapeutic and educational environments. A graduate level marriage and family therapy program in South Florida is currently offering Equine Assisted Relational Learning (EARL) activities focused on teaching a specific sub-model of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP), known as Equine Assisted Family Therapy (EAFT). The experiential nature of EAP and EARL transforms abstract concepts such as thoughts and mannerisms into tangible experiences, as well as highlights behavioral patterns. The unique and innovative theoretical foundation of EAFT is being taught, demonstrated, and utilized to assist graduate level therapists with professional development through EARL by participating in equine assisted activities and processing their lived experiences.

The purpose of this study was to explore the professional development of graduate students who enrolled in and completed the introductory course in Equine Assisted Family Therapy (I-EAFT) and the advanced Equine Assisted Family Therapy (A-EAFT) course, and who served as clinical staff at the affiliated non-profit equine assisted therapy organization, known as Stable Place. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology was utilized as the structure for data collection and analysis. The results of this study indicate the participants related learning about their personal identities to their professional identities through EARL. The implications of this systemic and relational learning style in the family therapy field promotes reflection on professional development through experiential practices.

Keywords: Equine Assisted Family Therapy, Equine Assisted Learning, Equine Assisted Relational Learning, Professional Development, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In all professions, individuals are trained in one fashion or another how to do their jobs. Sometimes training occurs in educational settings such as universities and trade schools, while at other times, training takes place on a ropes course, in subject specific workshops, or in other places considered outside the classroom. The difference in where the trainings take place is dependent upon the type of experience the professionals are seeking. For example, when a company wants their employees to learn a new computer system, this could be accomplished in a classroom setting. If the company is looking to strengthen the working relationships and leadership skills of their employees, the company may bring their employees to a ropes course in order to have a more experiential/kinesthetic type of training. Kranz (2011) quoted Stephen Burnett, saying, “There are limits to what people learn in the classroom or even on the Web. For skills such as communication, coaching and enabling team performance, people have to be given an opportunity to immediately apply them” (para. 6). The same is true for therapists in all stages of their career.

Marriage and family therapy students begin their training in traditional classroom settings. As they progress through the educational program, marriage and family therapy students encounter hands-on clinical experience paired with supervision. How clinical supervision is facilitated is dependent upon the specific educational program in which the marriage and family therapy student is being trained. Some institutions engage in supervision of live sessions, which provides immediate feedback, while others utilize a group supervision format. In South Florida, one professor (Green, 2019) has developed

an innovative method of experiential supervision that is situated in hands-on interactions with horses, and which is known as Equine Assisted Relational Learning (EARL).

Equine Assisted Relational Learning

EARL is a new term coined to differentiate between the generalized EAL and EAL informed by EAFT. The term, EARL, elucidates how the study participants connected their education in EAFT to relational concepts that include their personal and professional selves. As EAFT is grounded in relational and systemic traditions, EARL follows suit. This type of relational learning allows for students to work with horses and notice their personal process and practice in different ways. EARL offers a process through which students discover more about their own personal and professional selves while learning a different way to provide therapeutic services.

In this chapter, I introduce the focus of study and briefly describe the assorted topics that are further discussed in the following chapters. I explain the importance of this research and the relevance it has for the future of family therapy training and practice. I discuss my personal connection to the study of EARL paired with family therapy supervision, as well as my involvement as the researcher. This study explored the experiences of a group of students who completed the introductory course in Equine Assisted Family Therapy (I-EAFT), the advanced Equine Assisted Family Therapy (A-EAFT) course, and served as clinical personnel at Stable Place; the study also examined how partaking in this experiential learning method has impacted their professional development.

The study focused on a family therapy graduate program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE),

which currently offers EARL activities that focus on teaching the art of Equine Assisted Family Therapy (EAFT) (Green, 2013). This is a solution oriented, relational approach to Equine Assisted Psychotherapy. The program offers two courses in EAFT, at an introductory and an advanced level. Both the concept of EAFT and the two courses were developed by Shelley Green, Ph.D (Green, 2013; Green, 2019), a professor at Nova Southeastern University (NSU). The EAFT courses originated as one course but eventually evolved into two courses at the request of the master's and doctoral level students to advance their training. Students who had completed the course(s) informally reported that learning about EAFT and engaging in the course activities had helped to further their professional growth, and as I had a similar experience when I took the experiential course, this sparked my desire to learn more about how this coursework could inform students' professional development.

In order to deliver the coursework, Dr. Green co-founded a 501(c)(3), not for profit organization, known as Stable Place. The doors opened in November 2012 and through this partnership with the university, Stable Place offers equine assisted therapy to individuals, couples and groups. Stable Place is staffed entirely by trained therapists, master's level interns who have completed the coursework at NSU, and by certified equine specialists who have also been trained through this coursework. Stable Place's purpose is to partner with four legged co-therapists (horses) to provide a safe and collaborative atmosphere that offers clients opportunities for growth and development.

This collaboration between Stable Place and the faculty and graduate students from the NSU Family Therapy program extends beyond offering courses to master's and doctoral level students. As students complete the two courses (I-EAFT and A-EAFT),

they are eligible to apply for an internship position lasting one year. During this time the interns are supervised by a Stable Place supervisor as well as a faculty supervisor from the Family Therapy program while they shadow and facilitate therapy sessions. At the completion of the internship, these students graduate from the program with a master's degree and have the choice to enter a doctoral track in the Family Therapy Program. If a previous Stable Place intern enters into the doctoral program, they are offered a Staff Therapist position in the organization. Through this didactic and clinical training process, all Stable Place therapists are able to bring a consistently relational, systemic foundation to the clinical work provided at Stable Place.

To further explore the impact of this experiential coursework, this research aimed to investigate the professional development of graduate students who enrolled in and completed the Introduction to Equine Assisted Family Therapy (I-EAFT) course and the Advanced Equine Assisted Family Therapy (A-EAFT) course, and who worked at Stable Place as a staff therapist or clinical intern.

Using Animals Therapeutically

The role that animals play in creating optimal therapeutic environments has gained recognition in various kinds of health care settings, such as hospitals, doctors' offices, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, occupational therapies, mental health facilities, and private practices (Chandler, 2005; Halm, 2008; Pichot, 2012). The presence of animals in these settings has been found to offer physiological and psychological benefits for those who encounter the animal. Examples of physiological benefits experienced when interacting with animals include decreased blood pressure, lowered

temperatures, slowed respiratory rates, and even reduced pain, which are all related to an overall reduction in arousal symptoms to foster relaxation (Halm, 2008; Pichot, 2012).

Examples of psychological benefits of interacting with animals in healthcare settings include greater perceptions of happiness, distraction from pain, a sense of delight and control, calmness, receiving unconditional love, and providing motivation to get better (Chandler, 2005; Halm, 2008; Pichot, 2012). More specifically, in regards to the mental health field, clients who have had contact with animals in the clinical process have reported experiencing an increased comfort level, faster rapport building, greater trust when the client observes the interaction between the therapist and the animal, increased motivation to attend sessions, and enhanced ability to focus their attention on external resources (Chandler, 2005; Pichot, 2012). A wide range of animals are being utilized in therapeutic settings; however, dogs, cats, birds, guinea pigs, and horses are the most popular (Berget, Skarusaune, Ekeberg, & Braastad, 2007; Delta Society, 2012; Lade, 2012; Nathanson & de Faria, 1993; Pichot, 2012).

Equines and Psychotherapy

Horses are being utilized in therapeutic settings in various manners, with different goals and expectations. According to Hallberg (2008), horses are used in therapy to assist and/or facilitate the therapeutic process. Hallberg emphasized that the difference between how a horse assists in therapy, versus how a horse facilitates therapy, is best explained by considering the definitions of the words. Merriam-Webster (2014) defines *assist* as “to give support or aid” or “to be present as a spectator” whereas *facilitate* is defined as “help bring about.” These distinctions are helpful in understanding how horses are incorporated into mental health services.

Initially, horses were being utilized as a medical intervention for occupational therapy to *assist* with strengthening posture, basic balance, joint disturbance and physical coordination for individuals, as well as assisting children with neuromotor and sensory dysfunction. Over time, it was discovered the horses were helping to *facilitate* personal growth and change through how the clients interpreted the natural reactions of the horses to their interactions. “Research results showed increased self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-awareness, and decreased violence and inappropriate social behaviors” (Hallberg, 2008, p. 61).

Essentially, the foundation for Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) developed when working with horses to address physical difficulties (Hallberg, 2008). Through this occupational type of therapy, it was observed that clients were benefiting on a psychological level as well, which enticed researchers to begin studying what the clients were gaining from these interactions. Since then, EAP has gained notoriety and respect as a powerful clinical approach being implemented with various populations, including individuals dealing with the effects of trauma (Adams et al., 2008), at risk youth (Bachi et al., 2011), people struggling with substance abuse and eating disorders (Dell, Chalmers, Dell, Sauve, & MacKinnon, 2008; Green, Schroeder, Penalva, Rolleston & Judd, 2018), survivors of domestic violence (Schultz, Remick-Barlow, & Robbins, 2007), and adolescents, adults, couples, and families desiring to better manage the stressors in their lives (Green, 2014; Green, 2017; Green, Rolleston, & Schroeder, 2019). EARL takes these processes one step further by encouraging self-enhancement through reflection on the personal and professional self.

Professional Development

Although the importance of Professional Development (PD) is stressed repeatedly in the mental health and family therapy fields, there is a lack of cohesiveness regarding the meaning of this term. In the past, PD has been equated to understanding the importance of addressing one's needs, whether personal or professional (Ross & Altmaier, 1990). Ducheny, Alletzhauser, Crandell, and Schneider (1997) developed a cohesive definition: "Professional development is an ongoing process through which an individual derives a cohesive sense of professional identity by integrating the broad-based knowledge, skills, and attitudes within psychology with one's values and interests" (p. 89). They follow up their definition by further suggesting, "Beginning with an introduction to the field and continuing throughout the professional life span, professional development is fostered by traditional academic experiences, mentoring, peers, relations, introspection, training, and supervision" (p. 89). For the purpose of this study, I will be utilizing the above definition when referring to PD.

According to Ducheny et al. (1997), PD is achieved in a variety of ways, influenced by factors such as the individual involved and the overarching purpose. "Professional development requires multidimensional growth and the integration of awareness, knowledge, and skills from various sources" (p. 89). Skovolt and Ronnestad (1992) explained that continuous self-reflection in the professional realm constitutes the central developmental process. Having a reflective stance is of extreme importance for professional growth, as it facilitates "an active, exploratory, searching and open attitude" (Skovolt & Ronnestad, 1992, p. 509). Through self-reflection (alone and through supportive professional networks), therapists grow and develop as they transition through

their career. EARL is a unique, alternative source for furthering professional development by engaging in a self-reflective stance through experiential learning.

Rationale for This Study

The experiential and relational aspect of EARL transforms abstract concepts such as thoughts and mannerisms into tangible experiences, as well as bringing to light existing behavioral patterns that may not have been noticed. Through these experiential, equine assisted activities, therapists offer self-reflective observations. According to Lum (2002), “The development of observation skills is a fundamental aspect of training to become an effective therapist. The ability to observe oneself . . . enable[s] therapists to develop more effective strategies and interventions” (p. 186). Enhanced personal insight into the professional self serves to benefit the field of marriage and family therapy by producing knowledgeable and effective therapists who are mindful of their position within the therapeutic realm (Cheon & Murphy, 2007; Lum, 2002; Northey, 2002).

Position of the Researcher

As a licensed mental health counselor, a certified addiction professional, and a family therapist, I am committed to exploring the unique lived experience of graduate level Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) students engaging in a course related to EAP and the connections made with these students’ professional development. Previous studies (Bachi et al., 2011, Kemp, Signal, Botros, Taylor, & Prentice, 2014; Meinersmann, Bradberry, & Roberts, 2008) have noted the usefulness of equines in relation to various types of therapy; however, other than one phenomenological study aimed at developing a theory regarding the influence of equine assisted activities on student therapists (Giraldez Carter, 2015), the field currently lacks research focused on

the use of Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) regarding the professional development of graduate level MFT students analyzed through their lived experience.

Summary

The purpose of this research study was to better understand the implications of EARL on therapist PD by exploring the lived experience of graduate students who completed the EAFT courses and worked at Stable Place in a clinical role. This chapter provided the reader with an introduction to how humans can benefit physiologically and psychologically by teaming up with animals, more specifically equines. I supplied readers with an overview regarding how horses are currently assisting individuals in growing physically stronger as well as facilitating learning opportunities. In this chapter, I also introduced a cohesive definition of PD and addressed the importance of such development for marriage and family therapists. I also provided a rationale for utilizing EARL to enhance PD for marriage and family therapists.

In Chapter II, I introduce the reader to Animal Assisted Therapies (AAT), the history of how this field developed, and the different modalities which exist. I will provide an in-depth look at EAFT and its connection with EAP and EARL, as well as how the EAFT courses are structured. I offer insight into how experiential learning assists with enhancing PD. I outline the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists' (AAMFT) required core competencies and connect this with current PD practices in the MFT field. I address the gap in the research of EAP and student therapists' professional development. In Chapter III, I introduce and discuss Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the qualitative methodology utilized to explore the reported experiences of the participants in this study. In Chapter IV, I

review the use of Quirkos, a qualitative data analysis software program; I discuss the findings from the analysis; and I present the emergent themes. In Chapter V, I discuss the connections between the emergent themes and the sub-domains of the AAMFT Core Competencies, the strengths and limitations of the study, and the implications for the field of family therapy.

As a graduate student who has previously experienced EARL, I remained cognizant of my own personal biases and assumptions in order to prevent my opinion from influencing those of the research participants. As the research participants engaged in a self-reflective process to develop a better understanding of themselves, I too utilized this reflexive stance in order to ensure the research produced was trustworthy and valuable to the future of the MFT field.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I offer an in-depth look into the field of Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) and provide a historical narrative of how animal assisted interactions were discovered to be helpful when working in clinical and educational settings. I provide a clear distinction between Animal Assisted Activities (AAA) and AAT and how Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) is connected. I discuss the innate characteristics of horses and connect them with EAP. I deliver a review of EAP, EAFT, and the theoretical underpinnings from which these works were developed. The basis of experiential learning and Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) is also reviewed, as well the implications of this type of learning in the therapeutic realm. A literature review of the existing studies in EAP and EAL is offered to show the usefulness of this work with various populations. I provide a framework for the EAFT courses, which the study participants have all experienced. I connect these experiences to the current professional development of marriage and family therapy students and conclude the chapter with a discussion of the gaps in the current research literature.

Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT)

Brief History

The bond between animals and humans is a significant connection that extends into the physical, psychological, and physiological needs of the human being (Urichuk & Anderson, 2003). The first documented use of AAT occurred in 1792 at the York Retreat in England, which was founded by Society of Friends (Jackson, 2012; Parshall, 2003; Pichot, 2012). The York Retreat was an asylum for the mentally ill that utilized farm animals to enhance the emotional wellbeing of the residents and reduce the use of drugs

and restraints (Jackson, 2012; Urichuk & Anderson, 2003). In 1860, Florence Nightingale became the first known clinician in the health care system to study how animals were beneficial with chronically ill patients (Pichot, 2012).

By the end of the 19th century, the use of animals in asylums became common practice in Europe. However, it wasn't until 1919 that animals entered the mental health field in the United States, when dogs became companions for residents in the psychiatric care ward at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Washington, D.C. (Jackson, 2012; Urichuk & Anderson, 2003). One account of animals having a positive effect on individuals in a state-run mental health hospital setting occurred during the 1960s in Lima, Ohio. A patient found an injured bird and began to rehabilitate the animal. Other patients realized what was happening and began working together to help the bird. Patients who were generally detached and withdrawn from each other were observed interacting with one another by the hospital staff. A yearlong study was developed after these observations, and it came to light that having animals in the wards with the patients reduced the amount of medication used (Urichuk & Anderson, 2003).

In 1962, Dr. Boris Levinson published the first article that touched on how the human-animal bond could be utilized in a therapeutic context. Levinson's (1962) article, "The Dog as Co-Therapist," told the story of how Levinson happened to stumble upon the benefits of using dogs in therapy. According to Levinson, (1962), a concerned parent had brought their child to see him after hospitalization had been suggested, due to the child becoming increasingly isolative. Dr. Levinson was busy writing when the parent and child came an hour early for their appointment. Forgetting about his dog, Jingles, who was lying at his feet, Dr. Levinson invited the family in without hesitation and

Jingles ran over to lick the child. As the parent tried to separate the child from Jingles, Dr. Levinson signaled to leave them alone. Levinson (1962) stated:

It is anyone's guess what might have been the child's reaction had the dog not been present that morning. For several subsequent sessions this child, apparently unaware of my presence, played with the dog. Gradually, as some of the affection elicited by the dog spilled over unto me, I was included in the play. We came slowly to the establishment of a good working relationship and to the eventual rehabilitation of this young boy. (p. 60)

Definitions and Differences

Since these publications, the field of AAT has grown immensely. Professional organizations were formed to monitor, protect, and promote AAT (Pet Partners, 2017).

AAT is defined by the Pet Partners (2017) in the following way:

Animal-assisted therapy is a goal oriented, planned, structured and documented therapeutic intervention directed by health and human service providers as part of their profession. A wide variety of disciplines may incorporate AAT. Possible practitioners could include physicians, occupational therapists, physical therapists, certified therapeutic recreation specialists, nurses, social workers, speech therapists, or mental health professionals. (Terminology, para. 6)

AAT is designed to promote improvement in human physical, social, emotional, and cognitive functioning. These types of sessions are held in a variety of settings and may be group or individual in nature. This should not be confused with AAA, as these two interventions serve different purposes.

With AAA, specific goals are not defined, and the setting is a casual meet and greet. An example of AAA would be a volunteer bringing his or her trained dog to a nursing home and encouraging those around them to visit with the animal. This is not the case in AAT, as the activities people engage in with the animals serve a specific purpose, such as improving fine motor skills, reducing anxiety, increasing interactions among group members, increasing self-esteem, and so on (Pet Partners, 2017).

Animal Assisted Activities and AAT should also not be confused with the use of Service Animals (SA), as this is an intervention designed with a completely different purpose. The role of SA is to assist individuals in performing specific functions when a disability hinders them from performing basic tasks on their own (Pet Partners, 2017). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (2011) revised their policy on service animals and defined them as dogs or miniature horses trained to work and perform tasks for people with disabilities. Examples of tasks that service animals perform include, but are not limited to, assisting the visually impaired by acting as their eyes, assisting the hearing impaired by alerting them to sounds, caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, aiding in walking, and alerting an individual when a seizure is about to occur or reminding an individual it is time to take medication (Pet Partners, 2017).

Overall, the concept of animals and humans working together in various ways continues to grow and develop. Human-animal interactions may have developed out of a need to survive but have since then transformed into a way of navigating through life. Humans are now partnering with a variety of animals for assistance physically, emotionally, and socially. However, horses are being utilized therapeutically because of the unique connection they have with humans.

Horses and Therapy

According to Hallberg (2008), EAP was derived from the foundational work of Hippotherapy, Therapeutic Riding and Animal Assisted Therapy. “The term hippotherapy refers to how occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech-language pathology professionals use evidence-based practice and clinical reasoning in the purposeful manipulation of equine movement to engage sensory, neuromotor, and cognitive systems to achieve functional outcomes” (American Hippotherapy Association, 2016).

Hippotherapy is used when rehabilitation of physical attributes is the therapeutic goal, such as posture, balance and mobility. However, this type of equine therapy has also been reported to positively contribute to the social and emotional well-being of people diagnosed not only with physical ailments but also mental health disabilities (Bass et al., 2009; Benda et al., 2003; PATH Intl., 2013).

The terms hippotherapy and therapeutic riding are sometimes used interchangeably; however, there is a difference between these practices. Whereas hippotherapy aims to improve neurological functioning and sensory processing, therapeutic riding contributes to the overall wellbeing of individuals with special cognitive, physical, emotional and social needs (PATH, 2014). Regarding therapeutic riding, Hallberg (2008) stated,

The movement of the horse may provide physiological benefits to those presenting with mental health issues. The research results show increased self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-awareness and decreased violence or inappropriate social behaviors. They do not, however, help us to understand why when astride a moving horse, clients repeatedly report a flooding of emotion and

memory, or even the sensation of an altered state of consciousness which in many cases leads the client to make notable behavioral change. (p. 61)

More specifically, hippotherapy and therapeutic riding are radically different in their overall purpose. The main objective in therapeutic riding is to teach and improve proper horseback riding skills for individuals with disabilities through exercising, stretching, and balancing. These activities are usually taught in a group format with occasional hands-on assistance by the instructor (AHA, 2010; Fosdick, 2009). However, in hippotherapy, specific goals and objectives are predetermined to improve neurological functioning in cognition, body movement, organization, and attention levels through activities aimed at decreasing muscular spasticity (AHA, 2010; Fosdick, 2009; The Children's TherAplay Foundation, Inc., 2013).

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy differs from hippotherapy in that it is a mental health practice. EAP is intended to promote both "personal exploration and clinical interpretation of feelings and behaviors" (Trotter, 2012, p. 9) to facilitate a client in learning, growing, and changing. Groups and individuals utilize horses to assist in preventing and/or resolving emotional and behavioral complications within themselves and others. "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 in their day-to-day interactions with each other" (Green, 2014, p. 2). As EAP is an experiential model, participants receive immediate feedback from the horses and then begin to instantly process what has occurred (EAGALA, 2010; Green, 2013; 2017; Green et al., 2019; PATH Intl., 2014). According to Hallberg (2008), EAP

is about connecting people to themselves, and the inner wisdom that is trying desperately to be heard. Through connection with horses, we find our way. We find the strength and the passion to step forward and bring about change, in our own lives and in the world. The way of the horse is a metaphor for how we could choose to live our lives. (p. xxx)

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy has been found to be beneficial for multiple populations struggling with a range of life challenges and obstacles (EAGALA, 2010). Over the last decade, research in this field of study has increased as researchers look for evidence to support the claims of effectiveness across a plethora of relational interactions in various settings (Bachi et al., 2011; Kemp et al., 2014; Meinersmann, et al., 2008).

With all the existing terminology utilized to depict the specific work being accomplished in this growing field, it is important to be clear about which terms are most relevant to this study. Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) will be used when discussing ground based, psychotherapeutic work with clients. Equine Assisted Family Therapy (EAFT) will refer to the specific model of EAP being utilized by the participants in this study. Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) will be utilized when referring to equine assisted activities facilitating personal growth. Equine Assisted Relational Learning (EARL) will be used to distinguish between generalized EAL and EAL informed by EAFT to enhance professional and educational experiences for various populations. Similar principles and practices of EAP and EAFT are applied to EARL, although it is not a clinical modality, but rather an experiential way of learning.

Horses and Psychotherapy: The Connection

As horses are prey animals, they have innate survival instincts that provide them with a keen awareness of their surroundings at all times. These instincts are an evolutionary development that lay the foundation for why horses are “alert, wary, and suspicious, have a highly developed flight reflex, and will fight when threatened” (Hill, 2006, p. 6). Horses do not automatically assume they are safe, as their survival depends on their ability to adjust to their surroundings and detect danger immediately. These self-preservation instincts are the reason horses are sensitive to context and respond instantaneously (Green, 2013; 2017).

The horse’s position on the food chain has determined the development of their physical characteristics and mental processes. For example, horses’ eyes are located on the sides of their heads, allowing them to have monocular and binocular vision. The eyes of a horse work independently of one another as well as together. Horses use their eyes to see all around their bodies as well as in front of them, allowing them to have an almost 360-degree field of vision (Hill, 2006; Irwin, 2005).

Another aspect of being a prey animal is hyperawareness, and horses demonstrate this clearly in how they respond to their environment. According to Irwin (2005), predators think in a goal oriented, linear manner, whereas prey animals are simply highly attuned to trying to stay alive. “While our predatory survival strategy alternates between fierce, focused concentration and complete rest, prey stay alive through a sensitive, all-encompassing awareness that never lets up” (Irwin, 2005, p. 24). Regardless of the activity a horse is engaged in (eating, sleeping, playing, pro-creating), constant vigilance is maintained.

Due to the innate hyperawareness of a horse, they can be metaphorically compared to being a mirror in that they reflect the physical and emotional states of the people interacting with them (Frewin & Gardiner, 2005; Giraldez Carter, 2015, Green, 2013; Green, 2017; Green, 2019; Trotter, 2011). The manner in which horses adapt to changes in their physical environment is the same way they adjust to humans entering their surroundings. Horses sense the non-verbal communication of humans to determine whether the intentions conveyed by that communication allow for a safe environment. The way the horses understand this interaction determines how they respond. According to Green (2013), “they read human behavior quickly, and are intuitive and responsive to that behavior. Horses have no ability, as humans do, to edit, misrepresent, or manipulate through communication; this alone alters the context of therapy considerably” (p. 3).

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy

The way EAP sessions are managed varies amongst practitioners; however, there is a general framework. For example, participants work with horses in either mounted or ground-based activities, and sessions are typically facilitated from a team approach (EAGALA, 2010; PATH Intl., 2016; Trotter, 2012). Whether participants ride the horses or not is determined by the EAP model the therapy team follows. Many EAP teams are comprised of an Equine Specialist (ES), a Mental Health Practitioner (MHP), and the horse. The responsibility of the ES is to maintain the safety and welfare of both the participants and the horses, offer observations of the horse behavior to the MHP, choose which horse(s) will be the co-therapist(s) for the session, and log the behavior of the horses. The MHP is responsible for structuring the session, documenting how the participants respond, and maintaining ethical practices. The horses (co-therapists) are

simply accountable for being horses (EAGALA, 2010). EAP is an experiential approach to enhancing psychotherapy and is grounded in humanistic theoretical underpinnings.

Theoretical Underpinnings of EAP

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy “is not so much a theoretical orientation as it is an approach that can be used in conjunction with a variety of other modalities and with diverse client populations” (Masini, 2010, p. 30). Although it is more commonly utilized in conjunction with various types of therapies, a few examples of theoretical underpinnings in connection with EAP can be traced back to Gestalt, Reality, Adlerian, and Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) (Trotter, 2011).

Gestalt therapy emphasizes personal responsibility and focuses upon the individual’s experience in the present moment (Gestalt Institute of Toronto, 2016). EAP draws upon this influence as an experiential form of therapy that highlights here-and-now moments when working with clients. During an EAP session, clients process their immediate experience, as “this is the experience that is present and can be attuned to and impacted” (Trotter, 2011, p. 10). For example, during an EAP session, if a client mentions that he or she is anxious, the therapist and client immediately begin to explore where the anxiety is coming from and begin to observe when the client starts to feel relief from the anxiety.

Much like Gestalt therapy, Reality therapy “emphasizes the importance of doing and thinking behavior” (Trotter, 2011, p.12), as well as needing to feel love and belonging. This notion is isomorphic to that of EAP, as clients are connecting their here-and-now experience with future possibilities. EAP also encourages the client to establish

a relationship with the horse, which in turn provides feelings of connection to another living being.

Adlerian therapy and EAP are similar in that the goal is for clients to leave the session feeling significant. The theory suggests that when an individual is encouraged, feelings of capability and appreciation emerge, resulting in the individual connecting to the task and cooperating accordingly (Adlerian Graduate School, 2014). An example of being encouraged, capable, and significant in a way that can be experienced immediately would be when a client successfully leads a horse through an obstacle course for the first time.

The connection between SFBT and EAP consists in the overall focus of creating a change. The SFBT model is more concerned with what is occurring instead of the reasoning behind the action, given that the solution does not necessarily relate to the identified problem (de Shazer, 1985; de Shazer, 1988). The same can be said for EAP, as “Equine Assisted Counseling focuses on action versus insight—new actions produce change” (Trotter, 2011, p. 10). Another connection between EAP and Brief Therapy is the attempt to provide a context for clients from which they can begin to adjust their negative expectancies to a more positive outlook that change will occur (Trotter, 2011).

De Shazer (1985) stated:

The most useful way to decide which door can be opened to get to a solution is by getting a description of what the client will be doing differently and/or what sorts of things will be happening that are different when the problem is solved, and thus creating the expectation of beneficial change. (p. 46)

Within an EAP session, after a client has engaged in an equine assisted activity, a conversation would take place reflecting on their experience with the horses and the relevance to their personal life. During processing, the questions would center around how this activity was or was not achieved, what worked and what did not, as well as what could be different going forward. This conversation will also emphasize how they connect their experience to their life outside the barn.

Overall, Gestalt therapy, Reality therapy, Adlerian therapy, and SFBT are four examples of theoretical frameworks that focus on clients being present and aware of the moment. As such, the EAFT approach is structured by the team dynamics of the MHP, the equine specialist (ES), and the horse; it is informed consistently by the systemic, relational practices of brief therapy.

Theoretical Underpinnings of EAFT

Equine Assisted Family Therapy, a derivative of EAP, is “fundamentally grounded in the relational, systemic assumptions that have informed the brief therapy field” (Green, 2014, p. 2). Green highlighted that the foundational perspective of EAFT is “strength-based, non-normative, and non-pathologizing” (p. 2). EAFT utilizes a brief, relational approach, as its roots come from theories embedded in systemic family therapies. Green explained, “We strive to honor and punctuate our clients’ strengths, to avoid pathologizing interpretations of their behavior, and to create—through our observations of their encounters with the horses—new meanings and understandings that can enhance their relationships” (p. 2). By attaching these clinical assumptions to an experiential therapeutic technique, the EAP approach is being further enhanced.

Equine Assisted Family Therapy “relies largely on non-verbal communication, spontaneity, careful observation, and creativity in learning to observe and utilize the immediate and powerful interactions between humans and horses to facilitate therapeutic change” (Green, 2014, p. 2). This is accomplished in the structure of the session and collaboration of participants and facilitators throughout. Just as in other EAP approaches, every session utilizes a team of facilitators consisting of a MHP, an ES, and a horse, working in conjunction with the session participants through various activities made up of simple tasks. “Activities are designed to allow the clients to experience metaphorically something they may be struggling with outside the arena” (Green, 2013, p. 257). For example, a couple might seek out services because they are finding themselves fighting more than usual. The clients come to the EAFT session and are asked to catch and halter a horse of their choosing. As the clients work on the task, the MHP and ES attend to their responsibilities. The ES watches the reaction of the horse to the clients while the MHP observes the interactions between the couple, how they manage the task, and the process it takes to do so. When the clients indicate they are finished, the observations of the MHP and ES inform the processing of the session. Processing questions are asked regarding the overall experience as well as ones that focus on specific observations made from a strength-based perspective. Examples of such questions include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Does this experience remind you of anything in your relationship?
- How did you figure out how to halter the horse?
- Does the halter symbolize anything for you?
- What did you notice about one another when working together?

- How did you manage to work through the struggle?
- What do you notice? What just happened?
- What is working/not working?
- What do you think the horses are doing, thinking, feeling?
- What are your goals? How do you define success? What does your success look like?
- What are your choices? What can you do differently?
- Is anything you are experiencing familiar to you?
- How does this remind you of an experience in your life?

Overall, these questions are meant to open a dialogue focused on the process of the interaction rather than the content, and are informed by a strength-based, non-pathologizing approach. To fully comprehend the usefulness of EAP and EARL, however, one must also understand experiential learning, as it is the cornerstone of all equine assisted activities.

Experiential Learning

Individuals participating in any type of training, workshop, or exercise usually forget a great presentation but often remember a great experience (Silberman, 2007). According to Silberman (2007), “It is now well established that the closer training resembles (even metaphorically) a learner’s work environment, the greater the understanding, the retention, and the application back on the job” (p. 2). In 1984, David A. Kolb presented Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and since then, research has supported its usefulness as a holistic model of learning with cross-cultural applicability (Akella, 2010; Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2011; Silberman, 2007). Kolb (1984) defined experiential learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the

transformation of experience” (p. 38). Kolb (1984) expounded upon this definition and drew attention to the critical themes of the experiential learning process.

First is the emphasis on the process of adaptation and learning as opposed to content or outcomes. Second is that knowledge is a transformation process, being continuously created and recreated, not an independent entity to be acquired or transmitted. Third, learning transforms experience in both its objective and subjective form. Finally, to understand learning, we must understand the nature of knowledge, and vice versa. (p. 38)

Stock and Kolb (2016) further broke down ELT into a four-stage cycle, including concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The cycle starts with a concrete experience that leads to reflective observation. From the self-reflective stance, abstract conceptualizations about the experience are created from the individual based on their developed theories, approaches, and metaphors. These concepts are then tested, thus producing new concrete experiences.

EAP and EAL follow the ELT in the way sessions are facilitated. The sessions begin with a concrete activity in which participants interact directly with the horses. As the session proceeds, participants are encouraged to reflect upon their experience and to consider how it may be relevant to their lives outside the barn. Participants are then given the opportunity to practice what they have learned in different equine assisted activities. “ELT is applicable not only to the formal education classroom but in all arenas of life. The process of learning from experience is ubiquitous, present in human activity everywhere all the time” (Kolb & Kolb, 2011, p. 43). Learners are continually adjusting to the information they are taking in.

Research in EAP

Overall, EAP is an experiential approach in which clients work from an in-the-moment position, where they are encouraged and supported to practice creating change. As previously indicated in Chapter I, examples of evidence-based research regarding the effectiveness of EAP include studies such as Meinersmann et al. (2008), Bachi et al. (2011), and Kemp, et al. (2013). Meinersmann et al. (2008) demonstrated how EAP assisted women in their recovery related to abuse. They interviewed five women who had all experienced abuse in their youth but were no longer in abusive relationships and had not been for several years. This group determined, through qualitative analysis, that EAP is a suitable intervention to assist with the women's perspective of having diminished mental health by improving their self-esteem and self-awareness, and by developing the ability to trust in a safe environment.

A study completed by Bachi et al. (2011) explored the effects of EAP on self-image, self-control, and trust when working with at-risk adolescents. The assessed parameters were self-image, self-control, trust, and general life satisfaction. The results of this study indicated a clear distinction between the test group and the control group. The results from the test group indicated an increase in trust, improved self-control, increased self-image, and increased general life satisfaction, whereas the data from the control group showed a decrease in trust, non-significant improvement in self-control, increased self-image, and a decrease in general life satisfaction. At a one year follow up with the session participants, significant differences were found between samples regarding social and legal aspects, as well reported drug use. These differences supported EAP as a useful approach to the improvement of fundamental aspects of adolescents' lives.

Kemp et al. (2014) focused their attention on evaluating an EAP program facilitated with a group of children and adolescents who had experienced sexual abuse. Participants were assessed at three different times throughout the study by utilizing the Children's Depression Inventory, the Child Behavior Checklist, the Trauma Symptom Checklist, the Beck Depression Inventory, and the Beck Anxiety Inventory. The results indicated a significant improvement regarding behavior, and a reduction of anxiety and depression, for both the children and adolescents who participated in the EAP program.

Equine Assisted Learning (EAL)

EAL is similar to EAP in that session participants engage with horses to learn about themselves in an experiential format. The difference between EAP and EAL is in the overall purpose of the work, although many researchers use the terms interchangeably, which creates difficulties when differentiating between the two practices. EAP is a clinical, mental health endeavor, which centers around making a change in the personal lives of the participants and which must be conducted by a mental health professional. EAL maintains a focus on learning specific skills and educational goals. With EAL, "the aim is not for participants to learn about horses, but rather to explore and develop their own skills, as well as to strengthen their personal competencies" (Fischer, 2014, pp. 6-7).

EAL is thought of as an enhancement to a previously established educational program. According to Hallberg (2008), EAL "occurs within both alternative and traditional educational institutions and promotes a deeper understanding of the subject matter being taught" (p. 381). Limited research exists regarding EAL specifically, although anecdotal accounts (Dell et al., 2008; Epston, 2011; Kelly, 2014), as well as

qualitative and quantitative research studies (Fischer, 2014; Giraldez Carter, 2015; Pendry & Roeter, 2012; Pendry, Carr, Smith & Roeter, 2014), are beginning to surface.

Research in EAL

An anecdotal account of the use of EAL came from Saskatchewan, Canada. On Lake Sturgeon First Nation resides the White Buffalo Youth Inhalant Treatment Centre (WBYITC), which is overseen by the Youth Solvent Addiction Committee (YSAC). YSAC paired the Westernized concept of resiliency with the First Nations epistemology of resiliency and connected this with the work being facilitated at the Cartier Equine Learning Center. YSAC's concept of inner spirit operationalizes resiliency as increased self-esteem, the development of trust, relationship building, and self-expression. The limited existing literature on EAL supports these concepts as themes which are enhanced when participating in EAL activities (Dell et al., 2008). "The participants of the activities learn through exercises with the horse about others' and their own feelings and instincts. . . The horse may be a safe starting point for learning trust and consequently overcoming fear, and developing healthy relationships" (pp. 95-96). By utilizing a culturally sensitive model of resiliency and pairing it with EAL, the goal of the YSAC was to assist youth in uncovering their inner spirit and strengthening this spirit by trusting and reaching out to available community resources.

Epston (2011) presented a testimonial on how the collaboration of the Join Up© method of horse education and training, developed by Monty Roberts©, combined with Narrative Therapy, engages people in a process of shifting their relationship with their overwhelming problems by changing how they see themselves. The Join Up© method is an exercise that takes place inside an enclosed circular pen. While inside the pen, a horse

and a participant interact through body language alone. The objective of the exercise is to be able to lead the direction the horse moves through nonverbal, non-tactile communication. Epston (2011) shared the experiences of the participants, and how their time with the horses made changes in their day-to-day interactions. For example, a 12-year-old boy, who had been limited in terms of how many hours a day he was allowed to be in a school setting based on his behavior, was reported to make changes after his first session with the horses. After engaging in more EAL sessions, the child was able to return to school full time.

Kelly (2014) shared another anecdotal report of EAL being paired with leadership development. Kelly (2014) utilized a Lacanian lens to explore the reorganization of personal impressions of the self and subjectivity within the theory and practice of experiential leadership development. According to Kelly (2014), Lacanian epistemology asserts “that leadership has no content, definition, or meaning of its own because it is merely a floating or empty signifier” (p. 217). In other words, the word “leadership” is more of a symbol that represents various characteristics. The features contributing to the overall image of leadership are important, rather than the actual symbol. Kelly (2014) experienced first-hand that one way human participants learn about themselves, and leadership, is through the leader-follower relationship with a horse, as he maintained a participant observer role in an EAL leadership program. Kelly (2014) connected the subjectivity of EAL as being perfectly aligned with Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory, which suggests “self-discovery and improvement can be achieved through a linear cycle of personal reflection and a successful merging of personal and social knowledge” (p. 226). Kelly explained that since humans are not able to access the thoughts of horses,

we can only make assumptions about interactions with the horses, which in turn are critical self-reflections. Kelly concluded that EAL works by demystifying previous thoughts about oneself and opens the individual up to thinking about his or her potential.

Pendry and Roeter (2013) conducted a quantitative randomized control trial to determine if an 11-week EAL program would enhance the social competence of 5th to 8th grade students. The study consisted of 64 participants within the experimental group, who completed a series of “once-weekly, 90-minute sessions of individual, team, and group-focused equine assisted activities, whereas children in the control group did not until 16 weeks later” (Pendry & Roeter, 2013, p. 1). The EAL program outlined 11 objectives, such as basic safety, respect, communication, leadership, trust, boundaries, overcoming challenges and building confidence, and enhancing self-regulation and relaxation, which were paired to corresponding equine assisted activities. Through the EAL activities conducted in this study, positive effects were observed in various aspects of social competence, such as self-awareness, self-management, personal responsibility, decision making, goal directed behavior, and relationship skills (Pendry & Roeter, 2013).

Research regarding EAL being a paired with the professional development of marriage and family therapists is sparse, save for a study completed by Giraldez Carter (2015). Giraldez Carter conducted a qualitative study by recruiting participants from the I-EAFT course at Nova Southeastern University (NSU) “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” (p. 8). Giraldez Carter analyzed 11 different data sets gathered in two separate ways. First, participants looked at still photographs and watched videos of themselves in class. The participants then reflected upon what they noticed on 6

different occasions. Secondly, the researcher held five private interviews with individuals from the same class at a later point in time. Giraldez Cater (2015) indicated significant differences were discovered in the personal reflections based upon the format in which the information was gathered. Giraldez Cater explained that the content of the discussion she had with the study participants differed based on the context in which the conversation took place (in class versus a private interview). When the students were discussing what they saw in photographs and videos, the conversation was centered around personal awareness, whereas during the private interviews, subthemes of the conversations consisted of “Personal Development (in a clinical context), Self of the Therapist, Clinical Skills and Viewing Therapy” (Giraldez Carter, 2015, p. 102), all of which are topics important to the education and supervision of MFTs as indicated in the AAMFT Core Competencies (2004). The AAMFT Core Competencies will be discussed in detail, below, in a section on professional development.

EAFT Courses at NSU

Through the I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses, students are not only learning how to facilitate EAP sessions, they are also engaging in EARL activities. The format of the I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses is similar in that the students are provided with an extensive introduction to equine assisted mental health approaches with a specific focus on EAFT. These courses are taught as hybrids, with class sessions alternating between the traditional classroom setting and the barn. Both courses include self-reflective activities, which are maintained and shared through an internet-based classroom as well as the development and demonstration of an equine assisted activity with a group of classmates.

Students who complete the course(s) leave with an understanding of how this work is developed and processed with clients.

The difference between the I-EAFT course and A-EAFT course can be found in the focus of the assigned readings and the participatory activities on barn days. Whereas the I-EAFT course was developed to teach students about EAFT from a macro perspective, the A-EAFT course hones in on self-of-therapist development. In the I-EAFT, the readings are geared towards understanding the nature of a horse (Hill, 2006), animal assisted therapies as a mental health practice (Parshall, 2003; Pichot & Coulter, 2006; Suthers-McCabe, 2001; Trotter, 2011), various types of equine assisted therapies (All & Loving, 1999; Ferwin & Gardiner, 2005; Masini, 2010), as well as an introduction to EAFT and its theoretical underpinnings (Green, 2013; Green, 2014; Green, 2017). The readings in the A-EAFT course focus on mindfulness and, as previously stated, self of the therapist development (Germer, 2004; Timm & Blow, 1999), various research studies regarding the use of EAP with specific populations (Adams et al., 2008; Dell et al., 2008; Klontz, Bivens, Leinart, & Klontz, 2007; Roberts, Bradberry, & Williams, 2004; Schultz et al., 2007), and a more in-depth understanding of the development and application of EAP activities (Trotter, 2011).

The actual equine assisted activities students participate in during each course are structured sequentially for students to gain an understanding of the process of EAFT and how it is applied when working with clients, as well as to develop awareness of their development as therapists. An example of an activity used in the I-EAFT course consists of having participants design an obstacle course and lead a horse through. Prior to leading the horse through the custom designed course, participants identify and label what the

physical obstacles metaphorically represent to them. As the team of students set forth to engage in the activity, the rest of the class observes the interactions between the team and the horse. When the students indicate they are done, the activity stops, and the processing begins. The students who participated are first asked about their experience and the connections they made and then observations from the instructor and classmates are shared. Processing the experiences of the students occurs both at the barn and in the typical classroom environment.

An example of an activity facilitated by Dr. Green in the A-EAFT course begins with students being blindfolded with their consent (Green, 2019). The students are then asked to touch and connect with one of the horses for a period of time. When the students indicate they are ready for the next step, they are instructed to partner with the horse in a way that encourages them and the horse to move together in a mutually desired direction. Throughout the duration of the activity, the ES holds the lead rope and supports the proximity and motion of the horse, while the students are in control of direction and movement. The processing of this activity often focuses on the self-awareness of the students and the students' perceived ability to bond with the horse, as well as how the students manage their anxiety in the moment and how they understand what leads to change (Green, 2019).

Current Supervision of MFTs

From a macro perspective, supervision is the art of training someone with less experience to grow, develop, and enhance his or her skills within an area of interest. The same is true regarding therapist development. AAMFT (2014) defines supervision as

the process of evaluating, training, and providing oversight to trainees using relational or systemic approaches for the purpose of helping them attain systemic clinical skills. Supervision is provided to an MFT or MFT trainee through live observation, face-to-face contact, or visual/audio technology-assisted means. (p. 8)

Although supervision is a mandatory requirement for completing educational programs (CAHSS, 2015-2016; Counselor Education Program, 2013), licensure (Florida Board of Clinical Social Work, Marriage & Family Therapy and Mental Health Counseling, 2014), and membership in professional organizations (AAMFT, 2014; ACA, 2014; APA, 2010), the manner in which supervision is conducted is dependent upon the supervisor and the supervisee. Even though AAMFT provides a structure for the expected outcomes of MFT supervision and the format such supervision must adhere to, it does not determine the means through which supervision is administered.

Currently, live supervision behind a one-way mirror is one of the most widely utilized forms of MFT supervision (Locke & McCollum, 2001; Wark, 1995). Locke and McCollum, (2001) explained:

This process is now accomplished through the use of a one-way mirror, use of a reflecting team, phone calls from the supervisor to trainee during the session, the supervisor entering the room to work with the family directly, and/or the trainee taking a break during the session to consult with those behind the mirror and returning to complete the session and perhaps provide feedback from the team. (p. 129)

Various articles support the concept of live supervision as being beneficial to the PD of supervisees (Locke & McCollum, 2001; Silverthorn, Bartle-Haring, Meyer, & Toviessi, 2009; Todd & Storm, 2002). During live supervision, supervisees have the opportunity to practice therapy skills in the moment and when they find themselves struggling with a client, the supervisee can turn to their supervisor and peers for immediate feedback and to gather suggestions on how to proceed. “Because opportunities are created for therapists to try out new behaviors suggested by supervisors in the immediate moment when the behavior is the most therapeutically appropriate, supervisors believe, supervisees’ learning is accelerated” (Todd & Storm, 2002, p. 284).

Live supervision is a type of learning/training considered to be experiential. “Experiential training exercises afford students a different level of comprehension of their preconceptions, in addition to helping them to cultivate their therapeutic skills, including empathy and sensitivity to others’ perspectives and experiences” (Helmeke & Prouty, 2001, pg. 535). The supervisee is learning in the moment as the supervisor assists him or her when needed. At the completion of the session, the supervisee is given an opportunity to reflect on the work they just completed and discuss their experience of being in the room.

Students participating in the EAFT courses experience a similar supervisory process as with live supervision. The difference is that students participate in a role play aimed to emulate a potential session rather than working with actual clients. Students view the horses as clients and utilize that metaphor while reflecting upon the reaction from the horses. Students then gain feedback from their professor as well as fellow classmates regarding their observations of the activity, which is similar to the behind-the-

mirror work in live supervision. From the immediate responses gathered from four legged or two legged clients, therapists continue to engage in activities aimed at professional growth and development.

In the family therapy field, PD is thought to be obtained through supervision that traditionally occurs through simulation and role playing, video recordings, live or dead supervision, co-therapy with a supervisor, observation of live therapy sessions, self-reports and notes, and group or individual meetings (Silverthorn, Bartle-Haring, Meyer and Toviessi, 2009; Lee and Everett, 2004; Geron and Malkinson, 2000, Stinchfeild, Hill, and Kleist, 2007; Vaccaro and Lambie, 2007). Supervision and PD are important aspects of the educational process of learning to become a knowledgeable marriage and family therapist.

Professional Development

Professional Development is a career-long endeavor connected with the process of learning, maturing, and growing as a professional. As previously stated in Chapter 1, Ducheny et al. (1997) defined professional development as “an ongoing process through which an individual derives a cohesive sense of professional identity by integrating the broad-based knowledge, skills, and attitudes within psychology with one’s values and interests” (p. 89). They went on to suggest, “PD is not simply a uniform set of experiences or skills. Instead, PD is a complex process incorporating personal and professional experiences, profession-based and individual values, skills and areas of expertise, educational background, and the establishment of professional relationships” (p. 89).

Professional development is an important aspect in today's workforce. It is imperative that professionals continue to enhance their skill sets and remain knowledgeable of the most up-to-date information specific to their fields. Supervision is only one way professional development is maintained. Another resource for professionals to maintain continuous professional growth is through active membership in professional organizations that host annual educational conferences, trainings, workshops, and webinars (AAMFT, 2014).

Professional Organizations

Professional organizations such as the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.) and Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) were created in response to the quickly growing field of equine assisted therapies. Although these organizations differ in regard to the types of equine assisted activities they engage in, PATH Intl. and EAGALA are similar in their mission. Both professional organizations aim to promote a safe environment for participants through training professionals in a specific equine assisted therapeutic modality.

Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.). PATH Intl. was originally formed in 1969 and titled the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) (PATH Intl., 2016). The aim of this organization was to “promote safe and effective therapeutic horseback riding throughout the United States and Canada” (PATH Intl., 2016, what is PATH Intl., para. 1). As of today, the focus of PATH Intl. has shifted to include various equine activities in which participants are engaged therapeutically. According to PATH Intl. (2016), these activities include

therapeutic carriage driving; interactive vaulting, which is similar to gymnastics on horseback; equine-facilitated learning and mental health, which use the horse as a partner in cognitive and behavioral therapy, usually with the participation of a licensed therapist; ground work and stable management; and PATH Intl. Equine Services for Heroes, which uses a variety of equine assisted activities and therapies disciplines specifically to help war veterans and military personnel. (About PATH Intl., para. 4)

PATH Intl. maintains a high standard of certified practices through offering various types of instructor certification and center accreditation. In order to achieve and maintain these certifications and accreditations, individuals and agencies must adhere to professional standards developed specifically by Path Intl. as well as pass specific requirements. For example, PATH Intl. offers four different types of certification and each certification has specific criteria which must be met prior to testing. Even after certification and/or accreditation is obtained, requirements must be maintained and the code of ethics must be upheld (PATH Intl., 2016).

Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA). Like PATH Intl., EAGALA is a nonprofit professional organization. It was started in 1999 to promote awareness and educate others regarding equine assisted therapeutic services (EAGALA, 2010). Whereas PATH Intl. has developed a standard of care for equine assisted activities with an emphasis on therapeutic riding, EAGALA specifically concentrates on EAP and EAL. It is important to note EAGALA-certified sessions are focused on implementing experiential activities in which participants learn about themselves through participation and verbal processing, not on horsemanship skills (Giraldez Carter, 2015; Trotter, 2012;

Jarrell, 2005). Overall, Path Intl. and EAGALA continue to enhance the equine therapies through further developing the profession and creating opportunities for its practitioners to grow and learn.

American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT). In the field of family therapy, a professional organization, the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT), established the ethical guidelines and set forth the professional and educational requirements in the field. The AAMFT core competencies were developed in order to outline the basic knowledge and skills required by MFTs. These objectives were established to improve the quality of services being delivered by practicing MFTs (AAMFT, 2004). Therefore, the inclusion of PD in the core competency subdomains indicates its perceived importance by AAMFT and, for the purpose of this study, will be used as a guideline for how PD is obtained and managed by MFTs.

AAMFT (2004) organized the core competencies into 6 domains (admission to treatment; clinical assessment and diagnosis; treatment planning and case management; therapeutic interventions; legal issues, ethics and standards; and research and program evaluation). According to Nelson et al. (2007),

The first four primary domains reflect the developmental trajectory by which clients enter a therapeutic system. The latter two domains capture the importance of ethical and legal issues in the practice of MFT as well as the value that research and evaluation play in the delivery of effective services. (p. 422)

The six core competencies were further divided into five subdomains in order to efficiently depict the requirements set forth. The five subsidiary domains (conceptual;

perceptual; executive; evaluative; professional) outline the types of skills and knowledge that MFTs must develop in relation to the six core domains. According to Nelson et al. (2007), each subdomain is defined as follows:

Conceptual Skills—What MFTs know. These skills demonstrate knowledge and familiarity with family therapy models and their concepts, system theories and thinking, and an awareness of the therapist as an agent of change.

Perceptual Skills—What MFTs perceive or discern. These skills provide for the interpretation of data through paradigmatic and conceptual lenses and tie theory or conceptual skills to what is happening in the client system.

Executive Skills—What MFTs do. These skills are the behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.

Evaluative Skills—How MFTs assess what they have done. These skills are the process of assessing and appraising the effectiveness of therapeutic activities and the therapist.

Professional Skills—How MFTs conduct therapy. These skills are the activities and attitudes of the therapist related to providing MFT, including professional development and identity. (p. 422)

The subdomains should be thought of as the objectives of each core domain, and serve as specific guidelines for further PD. “These subdomains are an amalgamation of previous work that has been proposed to help MFT educators and supervisors” (p. 422). These subdomains provide a foundation for MFT supervisors when working with MFT supervisees regardless of professional experience, as well as set forth a structure for continual professional development.

Summary

At this time, there are no qualitative or quantitative research studies that specifically focus on EAL and the professional development of graduate level MFT students. According to Orlinsky and Ronnestad (2005),

The weight of scientific evidence favors viewing therapy as a professional relationship in which the quality of personal relatedness between patient and therapist as individuals is a key factor in strengthening (or limiting) the impact of therapeutic procedures. According to this view, research on the abilities and experiences of psychotherapists should be seen as a relevant and valuable complement to those areas of research that focus on therapeutic processes and outcomes, and the lives and problems of patients. (pp. 6-7)

In other words, Orlinsky and Ronnestad (2005) are conveying the need for further research that focuses on the lived experience of MHP and their PD process. This research study will assist in bridging the gap between the lived experience of MFT graduate students and their professional development as clinicians through the use of EARL.

This chapter provided an overview of the existing literature concerning the use of equine assisted activities utilized in various ways, from numerous perspectives, with a focus on EAL from an MFT lens. This chapter also discussed the theoretical underpinnings that connect EAP, EAFT, EAL, EARL, and PD. In Chapter III, I discuss how the study was designed, as well as the use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Through the use of IPA, this study explored the various lived experiences of participating MFT graduate students.

Chapter III: Methodology

In this chapter, I present an overview of qualitative research, phenomenology, and IPA, along with the rationale for using this method to gather the interviewees' experiences in the I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses and as clinical Stable Place personnel, particularly as they relate to their professional development. I discuss the inclusion criteria for participants and the procedures that were implemented throughout the research process. I also provide an overview of the data collection and analysis methods I utilized, discuss ethical issues significant to the study, and explain my role as the researcher.

Qualitative Research

Hays and Singh (2012) define qualitative research as “the study of a phenomenon or research topic in context” (p. 4). According to Finlay (2011), “qualitative research illuminates the less tangible meanings and intricacies of our social world. Applied to the therapy field it offers the possibility of hearing the perceptions and experiences” (p. 8) of the population being studied. Therefore, through qualitative methods, researchers can explore the meaning of the human experience while simultaneously considering the larger context in which that experience is embedded. As related to this study, I have explored how the participants have made sense of their lived experience within the I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses and as Stable Place clinical staff. I further studied how these experiences were related to their professional development as family therapists in training.

Hays and Singh (2012) suggest that “qualitative research is both inductive and recursive, involving ‘discovery and verification’— moving back and forth between the

research process and reflection on the process findings” (p. 5). The method of gathering a fully developed and understood description from a subject’s perspective is comparable to the therapeutic process. The client speaks and the therapist asks questions, which encourages the client to further develop his or her description. In turn, a more descriptive telling of the experience assists the therapist in developing a thorough, in-depth understanding of the client’s perspective.

The desired result of a qualitative analysis is to emphasize the voices of the participants, offering a detailed description and understanding of the problem (Creswell, 2007). This is typically accomplished by conducting interviews, while simultaneously remaining sensitive to both the interviewees and the environment itself (Moon, Dillon, & Sprenkle, 1990). I chose to use qualitative research methodologies for this study in order to gather a contextual understanding of the participants’ experiences.

As the aim of qualitative research is to answer inquiries related to description and understanding (Finlay, 2011; Hays & Singh, 2012), questions are asked in the “what” and “how” format. These types of questions allow for a “thick description” of the experience in question. Hays and Singh (2012) define thick description as “providing a comprehensive and focused picture of a behavior or occurrence that includes relevant psychosocial, affective, and cultural undertones” (p. 8). The importance of qualitative inquiry lies in understanding the specifics of why or how people develop meaning and behaviors related to a particular phenomenon (Schlapfer Colmer, 2014).

Qualitative inquiry is isomorphic to systems theories in that phenomena are understood within the context in which the phenomenon occurred, as well as the idea that multiple perspectives exist in relation to the same phenomenon. My aim was to elicit

vivid and accurate individual descriptions of graduate level students who have completed both courses in EAFT and worked as clinical Stable Place staff. Polkinghorne (1997) advocated that qualitative research is the most applicable method for explaining the descriptions of human action and experience: “Narrative transforms a mere succession of actions and events into a coherent whole in which these happenings gain meaning as contributors to a common purpose” (Polkinghorne, p. 13). By utilizing a qualitative research methodology, I was able to explore and formulate a contextually grounded understanding of the lived experiences of participating graduate level students. Fittingly, I utilized a phenomenological approach in order to capture their unique lived experiences.

Phenomenological Qualitative Research

Munhall (1994) stated, “To know the meaning of an experience is the way to understand the meaning of being human” (p. 43). Phenomenological research intends to provide insight for the researcher as study participants deliver a nuanced understanding of their perspective, through rich description and detail of the phenomenon being explored. According to Finlay (2011), “The aim of phenomenology is to describe the lived world of everyday experience” (p. 10). By capturing the lived experience of the person, the researcher allows the meanings the person attaches to his or her involvement to become clearer and more easily understood.

This study was designed to gather an in-depth, distinct understanding of how students in the I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses, as well as those employed by Stable Place in a clinical position, made sense of their experience and related it to their professional development as family therapists in training. The objective of the rich description is to understand the phenomenon through the viewpoint of the participants. Finlay (2011)

suggests that phenomenology “offers individuals the opportunity to be *witnessed* in their experience and allows them to ‘give voice’ to what they are going through. It also opens new possibilities for both researcher and researched to *make sense of* the experience in focus” (p. 10). This form of inquiry parallels the intentions of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), as I was interested in understanding how the participants in this study make sense of their experience as related to professional development in the EAFT courses and their time working as clinical staff at Stable Place.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was formally developed in the mid-1990s as a response to a belief that research in psychology had ignored the subjective experience of study participants (Rose, 2016; Smith, 1996). IPA was designed to capture experiential and qualitative aspects that could later be discussed in the discourse of mainstream psychology (Finlay, 2011; Smith, 1996; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). “The aim of IPA is to explore the participants’ view of the world and to adopt, as far as is possible, an insider’s perspective of the phenomenon under study” (Smith, 1996, p. 264).

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis is considered a post-positivist approach, as IPA researchers are concerned with the multiple perspectives of their research participants, while maintaining a stance of being “reductionistic, logical, empirical, cause-and-effect oriented and deterministic based on a priori theories” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 24). This stance is in line with Smith’s desire to develop a form of analysis that studies subjective experiences, while remaining part of the mainstream psychological discourse (Smith, 1996, Smith et al., 2009). As such, IPA draws its theoretical underpinnings from three important traditions regarding the philosophy of

knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Finlay, 2011, Rose, 2016, Smith et al., 2009).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the first major underpinning of IPA, as it is “a philosophical approach to the study of experience” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 11). IPA draws on the work of four philosophers who shaped phenomenology: Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre (Smith et al., 2009). Although these philosophers interpret how individuals make sense of their lived experience differently, they are all interested in how humans understand the world in which they live. Husserl’s work established the foundational importance of focusing on individual’s experiences and perceptions. Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre further developed this perspective to include other variables which contribute to one’s lived experience. Essentially, these philosophers emphasized the significance of experience and its subjective nature.

Hermeneutics

The second underpinning of the IPA approach is hermeneutics, “the theory of interpretation” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 21). Hermeneutic theorists focus on how something is interpreted, the context of a text’s origin, and the context of the text’s interpretation. Three of the most influential hermeneutic theorists were Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer (Smith et al., 2009).

Schleiermacher believed interpretation involved *grammatical* (the exact and objective textual meaning) and *psychological* (the individuality of the participant) meanings (Rose, 2016; Smith et al., 2009). Essentially, in order to begin to understand a

person's experience, the hermeneutic researcher must look at the words a person chooses to use for descriptions and understand these words within the context of their perspective.

Part of the aim of the interpretive process is to understand the writer, as well as the text, and Schleiermacher believes that if one has engaged in detailed, comprehensive and holistic analysis, one can end up with an understanding of the utterer better than he understands himself. (Smith et al., 2009, p. 22)

As this relates to IPA, what the researcher deduces from the lived experience of the participant is a product of the detailed analysis from which larger connections are made.

The second theorist, Heidegger, focused on the notion that not only do things have specific visible meanings, they can also have concealed meanings as well.

Thus for Heidegger, phenomenology is concerned in part with examining something which may be latent, or disguised, as it emerges into the light. But it is also interested in examining the manifest thing as it appears at the surface because this is integrally connected with the deeper latent form—which it is both a part of, and apart from. (Smith et al., 2009, p. 24)

In relation to IPA, two key points stand out: how Heidegger understands interpretation and the relationship between the telling of the experience, which is to be interpreted, and how the preconceptions of the interpreter are maintained (Smith et al., 2009).

The third theorist, Gadamer, emphasizes the importance of history and the effects it has on the interpretive process. According to Smith et al. (2009),

The phenomenon, the thing itself, influences the interpretation which in turn can influence the fore-structure, which can then itself influence the interpretation. One

can hold a number of conceptions and these are compared, contrasted and modified as part of the sense-making process. (p. 26)

In regard to IPA, Gadamer emphasizes the relationship between preconceptions and the phenomenon being explored. This is recursive, as the interpreter begins to understand his or her bias during the process of interpreting the data.

Hermeneutic Circle

The underlying assumption of the hermeneutic circle, as explained by Smith et al. (2009), is that “to understand any given part, you look to the whole, to understand the whole, you look to the parts” (p. 28). Essentially this notion explains that the meaning a person attaches to his or her words can only be understood within the context of the conversation (collected data). Furthermore, when one conversation is placed within the context of the collected data in its entirety, the conversation takes on another meaning. The hermeneutic circle is the foundation of the analytical process that best illustrates how an IPA researcher makes sense of the collected data in a relational manner.

Ideography

The third significant influence upon IPA is ideography, which focuses on the particular (Rose, 2016; Smith et al., 2009). Ideography is a strong fit for this study, as “IPA is committed to understanding how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). A key point in how ideography fits with IPA is that although it does not avoid generalizing, the idea is to move from the particular experiences of the interviewee to a more general statement, while simultaneously being able to retrieve the specific claim for all participants involved.

Generalizations are developed cautiously and through the iterative process from which IPA operates.

Summary of IPA

To summarize, IPA researchers are interested in exploring the lived experience of their study participants and how they make sense of their experience. “It wants to know in detail what the experience for *this* person is like, what sense *this* particular person is making of what is happening to them” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 3). This is accomplished through the exploration, description, and interpretation of the participants’ lived experience (Fournier, 2014; Smith & Osborne, 2008).

Participants

This study recruited masters and doctoral students who participated in the I-EAFT and the A-EAFT courses from the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) accredited Family Therapy Program at Nova Southeastern University. Participants had voluntarily registered for both elective classes, which in turn made them eligible to work at Stable Place in a clinical capacity.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To be included in the study, participants were master’s and doctoral students who had completed the I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses and had worked with Stable Place as a staff therapist or clinical intern. All participants were over 18 years old and volunteered to participate. Participants agreed to be included in the study through an informed consent. The exclusion criteria for the study included any individual who had not completed the I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses and/or had not been employed by Stable Place as a staff therapist or clinical intern.

Participant Recruitment

In order to be theoretically consistent with IPA's methodological orientation, researchers undertake purposeful sampling. Participants are intentionally selected, based on the premise of how closely they represent a viewpoint, rather than by how much they represent a specific population (Fournier, 2014, Smith et al., 2009, Smith & Osborne, 2008). Accordingly, participant recruitment focuses on individuals who have engaged in the phenomena under study, as they can offer insight into the particular experience.

Additionally, a small sample size is recommended, generally between three to six participants. This allows the researcher to explore in detail the similarities and differences within the group of participants. Given that IPA focuses on detailed accounts of the participants' experience, "the issue is quality, not quantity, and given the complexity of most human phenomena, IPA studies usually benefit from a concentrated focus on small number of cases" (Smith et al., 2009).

For this study, six participants were recruited through an emailed flyer addressed to all individuals who met the inclusion criteria. The email directed the interested party to open the attached flyer, which stated the purpose of the study, the inclusion criteria for participants, the estimated length of time needed to complete the semi-structured interview, and contact information for the researcher. Students were given two weeks to respond to the email prior to a second reminder email being sent out. Students who responded to the email were asked to schedule a time to have a phone conversation in order to be provided with a brief overview of the study and to have any of their immediate questions answered. During this phone conversation, I emphasized that our interviews would be audio recorded. Participants were also advised that the decision to

participate or not would not impact their grade for the internship, their performance in their academic program, or their employment. When the student agreed to participate, I scheduled the semi-structured interview within two weeks of the phone call.

Data Collection

Qualitative inquiry into a phenomenon begins with the collection of data (the experience of the study participants). For the purposes of this study, semi-structured interviews were held at the barn where the I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses took place, or through Doxy.me, a telemedicine service which complies with HIPAA and HITECH requirements and allows for face-to-face video conferencing. The barn is a privately-owned facility and offered a confidential atmosphere for the semi-structured interviews. The reason for holding the interviews at the barn was to provide environmental cues to assist with autobiographical memory retrieval. “Researchers have employed this technique to enhance elicitation of personal memories and have found that external influences (i.e., retrieval cues) are important for memory performance” (Kim & Jang, 2014, p. 4).

Each interview started with me reiterating the previous phone conversation and again pointing out that our conversation was being audio recorded. The participant was previously provided with an informed consent form via email immediately after the initial phone call and scheduling of the semi-structured interview. Prior to the interview taking place, the informed consent form was signed and returned to me via email or in person, depending on how the interview was administered. Once I made contact with the participant, I let him or her know when I started the digital audio recording. Upon completion of the semi-structured interview, I transcribed the interviews, re-checked the

transcription for accuracy, and then permanently destroyed the original audio-recordings. Since then, the confirmed transcriptions were protected by being kept on an encrypted flash drive, which has been stored in my home office in a locked filing cabinet.

Semi-Structured Interview

Finlay (2011) noted that “phenomenological research is potentially transformative for both researcher and participant” (p. 10), as it provides participants an opportunity to voice their experience and be heard. As such, the interview was formatted in a manner that was comparable to the therapeutic process. I, as the interpreter, encouraged the participants to develop their depiction of their lived experience by asking open ended, semi-structured questions. Throughout the interview process, as the participants focused on their involvement with the EAFT course(s) and their experience working at Stable Place, they reflected on their previous involvement and transformed it by making sense of the experience. I also asked unstructured, follow-up, open-ended questions to further support the focus of the conversation and confirm my understanding of the participants’ words. None of the interviews lasted longer than two hours.

Interview Questions

The semi-structured interview questions were as follows:

- If you had a clinical superpower, what would it be, and why?
 - A superpower is a clinical strength you believe you excel in.
- What informed your decision to engage in Equine Assisted Relational Learning (EARL)?
 - Prompt: What was it like for you to be enrolled in
 - The Introduction to Equine Assisted Family Therapy Course?

- The Advanced Equine Assisted Family Therapy Course?
- Was there a specific experience in the courses that impacted you more than others?
 - Prompt: Was there a specific experience in the course that you found less helpful than others?
- How would you describe the transition from learning the theory of Equine Assisted Family Therapy to applying it clinically with clients?
 - Prompt: Did you encounter any difficulties?
 - Prompt: How were those difficulties managed?
- Can you share your first experience of working as an Equine Assisted Therapist?
 - Prompt: Are you able to recall your takeaway from that experience?
- Was there a specific experience while working at Stable Place that you found less helpful than others?
- How would you describe the cultural tone of Stable Place?
- How, if at all, did your experiences with Equine Assisted Relational Learning carry over into your clinical work?
- Describe for me a situation currently unfolding in your practice, with a client.
 - What is informing the clinical process?
 - Do you ever feel constrained?
- How did this experience impact your therapeutic framework?
 - Prompt: Imagine five years from now, you are thriving in a successful private practice, but you do not have access to facilitate Equine Assisted Family Therapy sessions.

- Prompt: How would you maintain your therapeutic “horse” framework in the room with a client who has not experienced Equine Assisted Family Therapy?
- Is there a metaphorical horse helping you guide the session?
- How would you “bring the horse into the session”?
- What skills did you develop while working with the horses that have crossed over into your day to day practice?
- Have you experienced any clinical limitations within the therapeutic setting?
- Have you experienced any clinical strengths within the therapeutic setting?
- Are there ways you can see this experience as being problematic to your overall professional development?
- Overall, how have you connected this experience with your development as a therapist?

Data Preparation

Observational field notes were taken throughout the semi-structured interviews as the method of capturing contextual information, such as nonverbal forms of communication and the atmosphere of the co-created experience between the participants and myself. Hays and Singh (2012) explained that observations “are assumed to be a representation of purposeful behavior and actual expressions of feelings, and field notes are assumed to be salient records of that information” (p. 228). These field notes were then compiled with the transcriptions from the digitally audio-recorded interview prior to analysis.

Another step of data preparation, which was used as a precautionary

confidentiality measure, was to de-identify and create pseudonyms for all participants. As the participants signed the informed consent document, I marked the forms with a P to signify participant and a numerical code indicating the order in which the interviews took place (P1). From this point forward in the study, the participants will be referred to by their pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Data Analysis

The analytic focus in IPA research is on the participants' attempts to make sense of their experience. This is accomplished through scrutinizing the collected data through various analytic perspectives while remaining committed to understanding how the participants attribute meaning to their experience in context. IPA research is "an iterative process of fluid description and engagement with the transcript. It involves flexible thinking, processes of reductions, expansion, revision, creativity, and innovation. Overall, the analytic process is multi-directional; there is a constant shift between different analytic processes" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 81).

In order to assist novice IPA researchers in making the analysis process more manageable, Smith et al. (2009) developed step-by-step guidelines. In doing so, their goal was to emphasize the fluidity of the process while also creating a sense of order. I employed the use of Quirkos, a qualitative data analysis software program to assist me in maintaining strict adherence to the IPA research steps guidelines, which is further discussed in Chapter IV. Below are the steps I followed as I engaged in analyzing the data I collected.

Step 1: Reading and Rereading

The first step for analyzing IPA research is to become fully immersed in the original data (Smith et al., 2009). I accomplished this by listening to the digitally audio recorded interviews in their entirety and writing down my initial impressions. Once I completed transcribing each digitally audio recorded interview into a Microsoft Word Document, I read the transcription while simultaneously listening to the recording and notating my thoughts and observations. I then continued by repeatedly reading the transcript without listening to the audio recording. As Smith et al. (2009) put it, this “process is about slowing down our propensity for ‘quick and dirty’ reduction and synopsis” (p. 82).

Step 2: Initial Noting

The next step involved continuing to re-read the transcripts while taking note of anything of interest. By engaging in this process, I became more familiar with the transcript and my notations became more comprehensive; at this point, Steps 1 and 2 began to merge. As the initial noting process continued, I was able to distinguish between *descriptive comments* (the participant’s response taken at face value), *linguistic comments* (words/phrases used by the participant to express meaning), and *conceptual comments* (abstract thoughts to help me further understand the participants’ understanding of their experience with the phenomena); I made notations accordingly (Smith et al., 2009). Through Quirkos, I was able to record my initial reactions, assumptions, and interpretations, as well as begin to code the different types of comments. By engaging with the transcriptions in this manner, I began making sense of the participants’

understanding of their experiences in the I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses and their time working at Stable Place.

Step 3: Developing Emergent Themes

The third step in IPA analysis is the identification of emerging themes. This is accomplished by looking at distinct portions of the transcriptions, as well as the comprehensive exploratory notations developed by the interpreter. Essentially the interpreter begins to deconstruct the participants' narrative, only to reconstruct the experience at a later point in time. "The original whole of the interview becomes a set of parts as you conduct your analysis, but these then come together in another new whole at the end of the analysis in the write up" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 91). This is a good example of the hermeneutic circle. For this process, I utilized Quirkos to organize portions of data, my comments regarding the data, and my interpretation of the emergent themes.

Step 4: Searching for Connections Across Emergent Themes

In this step, the interpreter works to bring together the existing themes based on the perceived patterns and connections. Interpreters are encouraged to explore innovative methods to effectively accomplish drawing together the emergent themes and produce a structure that shows the interesting and important aspects of the participants' experience. For this process, through the help of Quirkos, I was able to visualize the emergent topics and arrange the themes based upon the connections between them.

Step 5: Moving to the Next Case

The fifth step requires the interpreter to repeat the above process with the next transcript. Smith et al. (2009) highlight the importance of treating each transcript on a case-by-case basis, even though the interpreter will be influenced by the previous

transcription. As I moved on to the next transcript, I continued to notate thoughts that occurred regarding previous transcripts into a Microsoft Word document to assist myself in staying focused on the current transcript.

Step 6: Looking for Patterns Across Cases

The final step of IPA data analysis involves the interpreter looking for patterns among the emergent themes that resulted from each case. For this step, I looked for connections across cases, how a theme in one case assisted in highlighting a theme in another case, and which themes stood out the most among all cases. This step assisted me in developing a more advanced level of organization.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers have argued that the concepts of reliability and validity do not pertain to qualitative research and should not be used to assess qualities (Fournier, 2014; Schlapfer Colmer, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). In regards specifically to IPA, Smith et al. (2009) recommended following Yardley's (2000) four broad principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research: *sensitivity to context*; *commitment and rigor*; *transparency and coherence*; and *impact and importance*.

The first principle, *sensitivity to context*, is demonstrated throughout the IPA research process as a whole. Researchers who choose IPA as a methodology start out by showing sensitivity to context by virtue of the idiographic element of the methodology. This principle is also demonstrated through the interactional process of data collection and data analysis. During data collection, in this case a semi-structured interview, I asked unstructured follow-up questions to further clarify the experience the participant was

conveying. Regarding data analysis, I made sense of how the participant made sense of his or her experience by immersing myself in the participant's narrative.

The second principle, *commitment and rigor*, is also demonstrated in IPA in various ways. Commitment starts in data collection and ensuring that the participants feel comfortable at all times. Commitment is also displayed in the degree of the interpreters' attentiveness to the participants' words and remaining close to the original collected data set during data analysis. Rigor (thoroughness of the study) is demonstrated in the purposeful selection of the sample, the thorough in-depth interviews, and making certain to balance my perspective of the participants' narratives while keeping in mind the participants' understanding of their experiences.

The third principle, *transparency and coherence*, is demonstrated in how the study has been written and will be dispersed to readers. Transparency refers to how clearly the research process is discussed in the write up. Coherence refers to how the themes fit together, as well as the research process remaining consistent with the underlying theoretical assumptions of IPA.

The last principle, as indicated by Yardley (2000), is *impact and importance*. According to Smith et al. (2009), "however well a piece of research is conducted, a test of its real validity lies in whether it tells the reader something interesting, important, or useful" (p. 183). My goal was for this study was to provide important and useful information to the field of Family Therapy education and training.

Ethical Considerations

Upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I began the research process, while keeping in mind the safety and wellbeing of participants. I

provided them with an Informed Consent form (Appendix A), outlining the details of the study and their rights as participants. This included making certain the purpose of the study was transparent to each participant. I also ensured they understood that the study was voluntary and that they were able to withdraw at any point without receiving an adverse response. I, as the researcher, clearly outlined the potential benefits of participating, as well as the minimal risks.

I anticipated a minimal level of psychological discomfort as a result of participating in the study, given that the outcomes would be reported back to the faculty member who developed the courses under study. I assured the participants that all identifying information would be de-identified by utilizing an alphanumeric pseudonym (example: P1) prior to discussing the collected data with the faculty member. I anticipated meeting any discomfort experienced by the participants with the same empathy, transparency, and patience I use in therapeutic settings. However, no discomfort was reported following the completion of the semi-structured interviews.

Another minimal risk I foresaw in this study was the loss of the participants' time. In total, participants were asked to set aside two hours of their time. To offset the risk factor, the interviews were scheduled based on the participant's availability.

Interviewing these participants allowed for further exploration of how the I-EAFT course, A-EAFT course, and being employed by Stable Place were related to personal and professional development. The participants' reflections and disclosures have created opportunities to further explore future possibilities of EARL.

Self of the Researcher

Schlapfer Colmer (2014) stated, “From a phenomenological perspective, objectivity is impossible, as the researcher becomes part of the research itself” (p. 106). Setting aside one’s preconceived notions is one of the most significant tasks in phenomenological research and is accomplished through what Finlay (2011) refers to as the “phenomenological attitude” (p. 23). This attitude is comprised of the researcher being open, nonjudgmental, and curious, while holding back personal beliefs and assumptions about the phenomenon (Finlay, 2011). Although this is not an easy task, it is suggested that phenomenological researchers engage in a self-reflexive journaling process in order to maintain awareness of biases and assumptions.

Due to prior my prior knowledge and experience with EAFT (as a clinician and supervisor), I found it difficult to separate myself from the role of the researcher. I remained curious about the participants’ perspectives and asked them to elaborate on their responses rather than assume I understood what was being conveyed. Having prior knowledge of the equine activities and EAFT lens assisted me with understanding the context being discussed and the language used to describe the experiences of the participants. I managed these complexities through the use of continuous self-reflexive journaling and by establishing a table to act as an audit trail of my thoughts as I analyzed the transcripts.

Summary

This chapter described phenomenological qualitative research and introduced IPA as the method of research design utilized in this study. I described how participants were recruited based on purposeful sampling, and I discussed the semi-structured interview

process. I explained how the data were collected and my use of Quirkos, which assisted in my analyzing the collected data. This chapter also reviewed trustworthiness and ethical concerns related to the study. The goal of the research was to ascertain how participants understood their lived experiences in the EAFT courses and working at Stable Place in relation to their professional development. In Chapter IV, I discuss the use of Quirkos and how it connected to the IPA process. I also present the findings from the analysis and discuss the emergent themes.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

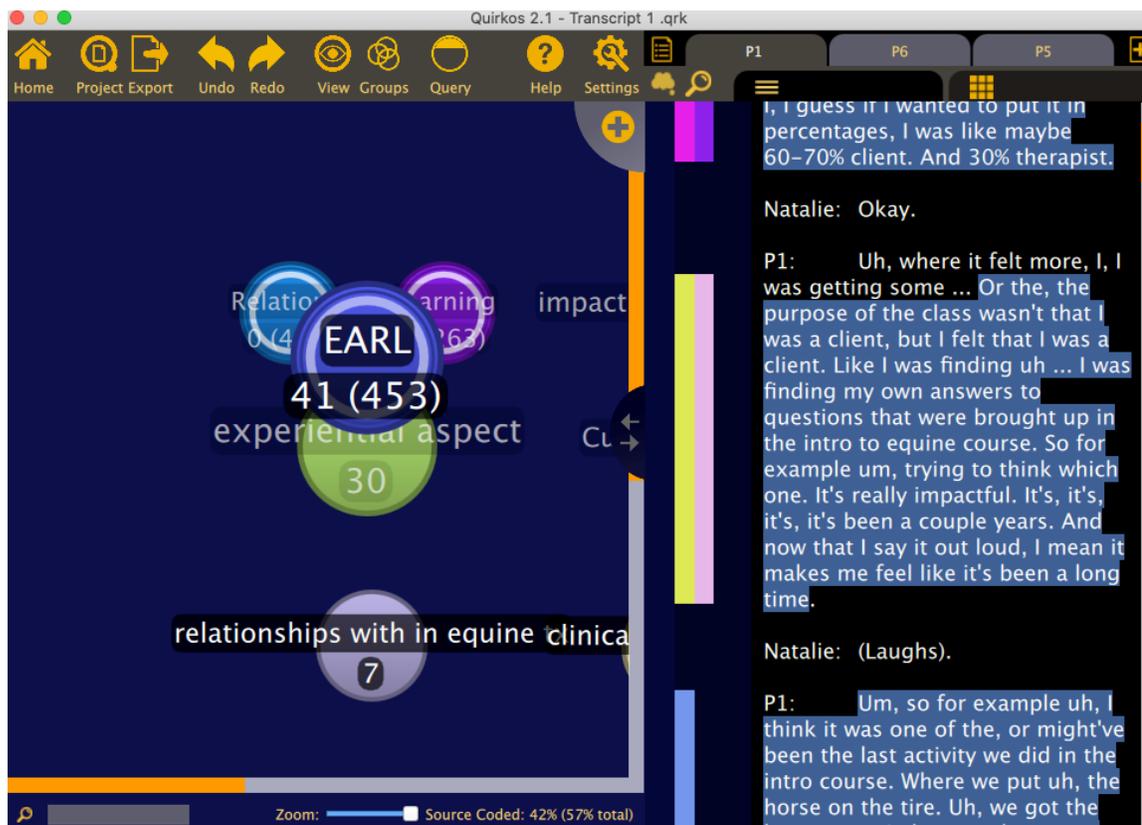
This chapter illuminates the master themes and sub themes that emerged through my analysis of the semi-structured interviews which were facilitated with six Stable Place staff members. Throughout the analysis, I was consistently informed by IPA. I provided information on how the qualitative research software program utilized for this study assisted in sorting through the six interviews and how it aided in maintaining consistent, correct execution of the steps of data analysis as described in Chapter III. Throughout this chapter, I examine the emerging master themes and sub-themes by including exemplars from the data which highlight the discussed theme. I provide a description of the themes as I explain how the excerpts connect with one another and with the subdomains of the AAMFT core competencies.

Quirkos

A qualitative data analysis software program known as Quirkos (designed to assist researchers in coding and retrieving information) was utilized in this study to analyze and code the data. The processes of using Quirkos begins with transcripts being uploaded into the program. As the researcher reviews the transcripts, they are able to add quirks (themes), which look like colored bubbles, on to the graphical interface (see Figure 1). Excerpts relating to the topic are added by dragging and dropping the information from the transcripts into the corresponding quirk. This action then results in the excerpt being color coded within the transcript as a whole. The excerpt can later be quickly accessed by double clicking the appropriate quirk. As more information is added to the quirk, it physically becomes larger in size, contributing to the researcher's visual identification among the more dominant themes. As the analysis of multiple transcripts

proceeds, the researcher is able both to continue utilizing the established quirks by adding to them and to create new quirks. The quirks themselves can be dragged and dropped into one another as themes become clearer and more precise. Quirkos tracks the data analysis process in its entirety and researchers are able to retrace their steps through various functions provided by the software program.

Figure 1: *Quirkos graphical interface with analysis represented by bubbles*



In this study, Quirkos was utilized by individually uploading pre-transcribed (IPA data analysis Step 1: Reading and Re-reading) participant-interview Word documents and then breaking down the transcripts, one by one, into various themes (IPA data analysis Step 2: Initial Noting, and Step 3: Developing Emergent Themes). Once this process was completed with all six transcripts, I began to match up the themes from transcripts 1 and 2 (IPA data analysis Step 4: Searching for Connections across Emergent Themes) and

proceeded to utilize the same process for the remaining four transcripts (IPA data analysis, Step 5: Moving to the Next Case). From there, I developed a graph in Microsoft Word to show the relationships between the master themes and the subthemes, indicating how I understood these excerpts to be related to the five subdomains of the AAMFT Core competencies. I then printed out a hard copy of the graph and cut out the individual excerpts in order to create a clear understanding of the patterns across the emerging master themes and subthemes (IPA data analysis, Step 6: Looking for Patterns Across Cases), and continued to rule out the non-matching selections. Through the utilization of Quirkos, I was able to maintain a rigorous observance of the IPA process.

IPA Connection

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) allowed me to perform a detailed examination of the personal lived experiences of students who participated in EARL by attending the two Equine Assisted Family Therapy courses and by working at Stable Place. This approach, consistent with my research aims, was utilized due to its commitment to the examination of how individuals make sense of their personal and social experiences (Smith et al., 2009). The IPA model supported exploration of each participant's journey into Equine Assisted Family Therapy and allowed me to explore how EARL impacted them personally and professionally. The flexibility of the semi-structured interview allowed me to spontaneously develop and utilize follow-up questions specific to the interviewee in order to gather a more thorough understanding of how participants made sense of their experience.

Presentation of Themes and Analysis

Through the data collected about the participant's experiences with EARL, two master themes emerged along with ten sub themes, which relate to the five subdomains (Nelson et al., 2007) of the AAMFT Core Competencies (AAMFT, 2004). Table 1 distinguishes EARL as the foundation for this relational and self-reflective learning approach and the derived sub themes. Table 1 also illustrates the connectivity between EARL and the five subdomains of the AAMFT core competencies.

Table 1. *Master Themes, Sub-Themes, and Connectivity*

EARL	Master Theme	Sub-Themes	AAMFT Sub Domains
<u>Equine Assisted Relational Learning</u> How interviewees connect their education in EAFT to relational concepts that illuminate further insights into their personal and professional selves.	<u>Relational Threads</u> How interviewees connect to the experience of clinical work.	Relational Responses Be in the Moment, Be Present	<u>Executive Skills</u> What MFTs do. These skills are the behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.
		Professional Development Personal Development Beliefs about Professional Identity Development	<u>Professional Skills</u> How MFTs conduct therapy. These skills are the activities and attitudes of the therapist related to providing MFT, including professional development and identity.
	<u>Learning Through Reflection</u> How interviewees connect learned MFT skills to clinical application.	Conceptualization Incorporating Theory	<u>Conceptual Skills</u> What MFTs know. These skills demonstrate knowledge and familiarity with family therapy models and their concepts, system theories and thinking, and an awareness of the therapist as an agent of change.
		Data Interpretation	<u>Perceptual Skills</u> What MFTs perceive or discern. These skills provide for the interpretation of data through paradigmatic and conceptual lenses and tie theory or conceptual skills to what is happening in the client system.
		Self-Assessment Experiential Nature	<u>Evaluative Skills</u> How MFTs assess what they have done. These skills are the process of assessing and appraising the effectiveness of therapeutic activities and the therapist.

Relational Threads

The master theme, Relational Threads, was derived from how the interviewees directly related their experience with EARL to their practice of clinical work, their personal and professional development, and their belief that the I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses were influential in their gaining a more complex understanding of themselves as clinicians. These topics were further expounded upon as they became connected with two of the five sub domains of the AAMFT Core Competencies—Executive Skills and Professional Development.

Executive Skills. According to Nelson et al. (2007), executive skills are “What MFTs do” (p. 422). These skills are the behaviors, actions, and interventions executed during the therapeutic process. I understood the emergent sub-themes to be about responding from a relational perspective, and about being in the moment, being present. These techniques were also discussed as being utilized in the room with a client. For the purposes of clarifying the underlying concepts of this research, I will refer to these qualities as relational responses because they enable and facilitate the unique, productive relationships that education in equine therapy generates, as will be explained below.

Relational Responses. This sub-theme refers to various behavioral responses performed in the therapeutic clinical setting that were most frequently discussed: curiosity, empathy, patience, clarity, intentionality, and supportive listening. The following excerpts will depict how the participants relate their experience with EARL to the work they observed themselves executing in the room with a client.

P3: EARL just allowed me to continuously take those tenets, those founding ideas, and continuously apply them. One of the ways that I’ve found that I’ve

done that is *just remaining in a space of curiosity*: being curious with the client on their perspective and then looking at the situation they're describing. What's the context of that situation? What could be different in that situation? If I find what's different, how do I then emphasize or promote those things elsewhere? So, I think through my questioning from my stance in the room, that's how I'm really always bringing in the work from the barn in there.

P3 explained that continual application of EAFT tenets facilitates them¹ in remaining curious about the client's perspective. P3 connected this skill they now use in the room with a client to how they worked at the barn. Similarly, P4 explained working with the horses taught them how to immerse themselves into the client's world view by remaining curious about the client's process, rather than making assumptions about the client's actions, as displayed in the following excerpt.

P4: I learned to *remain curious* about the clients' process because the horses allow you to get into the clients' world in that moment. When they're struggling to lead the horse or they are terrified of approaching the horse or they're ambivalent or "resistant," whatever is happening in relation to the horse, tells me *get curious about what's happening for the client*. It invites me to be curious rather than assume they're failing, or they don't want to do it. It's got everything to do with the moment and what's happening between the two of them. So, instead of assuming things, I am curious about them.

¹ I chose not to assign a gender to the participants as the gender disparity of the participant population is limited. Participants are referred to by using they/them pronouns in order to maintain the utmost confidentiality.

P6 discussed how they conceptualize therapy as a conversation without a plan. They conceive that their role in the conversation is to listen, be present, and calming, just like the atmosphere the horses provided for them. P6 further explained what they observe themselves doing in the room and how this being with their clients relates to their experiences with the EARL. P6 emphasized that they learned from the horses how to support the client without trying to fix the problem or make the client feel better.

P6: In therapy, we have this thing where it's you don't plan. You just go in there, and you say, I'm just going to have a conversation, *just go in and listen, and be present and be a calming presence to people*. Because that's what the horses are for me, and that's what we are for our clients.

P6: I think sometimes what I tend to do is try to make it better, even in my personal life I always want to help, I always want to make it better. The horse doesn't necessarily think like that. They just sit there, [recognizing that] this person's upset, I'm just gonna be here, I'm just gonna let them pet me.

Essentially, just being in the darkness with your client. And being okay with that. Knowing that, we're just going to sit in this, and it's okay. That's the only thing that we need to do is just sit there, we don't need to make it better right now. We just need to feel it. And that's what the horse would do. They would just let you feel it.

Be in the moment, Be present. Another sub-theme which is connected to the AAMFT core competency sub-domain Executive Skills, is being in the moment and being present when with clients. This sub-theme was represented by participants sharing

their experiences of reminders to remain present, the talk of mindfulness throughout the courses, and relating growth in mindfulness to their practice of EARL.

P3: I started to work on abandoning those confines of the models and what constricted me and allowed myself to utilize what was happening. I *reminded myself to stay present* rather than five steps ahead and I think that's where *I'm at now is constantly reminding myself to stay present*.

P3 expressed their solution to slow down their pacing with a client in the therapy room and was reminding themselves to stay present and utilize what was happening. In our conversation, P3 explained this was something that came to them easily at the barn; because of the horses, they began to incorporate the same thought process into the therapy room. Interestingly, P1 talks about being present in terms of mindfulness by describing how they connected with mindfulness in the I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses. P1 further explained that discourse revolving around mindfulness in class reminded them to practice these skills with their clients as a way to maintain staying in the moment and remaining intentional.

P1: With the mindfulness readings and the mindfulness talk that we had in the intro and in the advanced courses, it made me curious about different mindfulness techniques, different ways to be mindful. *The talk of mindfulness in class helped to remind myself to be in this moment, with this client, with this child, and to give them the time that I intentionally set aside for them.*

P5 and P6 highlight EARL as where they learned the skill to be present and remain in the moment. P5 relates how they remain present and in the moment with their clients, refraining from planning the next question, and ceasing to think into the future,

connecting these practices to having worked with the horses. Similarly, P6 explained that the A-EAFT course taught them to remain focused on what was occurring rather than thinking about what they should be doing next.

P5: I'm a big believer in *the therapist client relationship being the most important thing that you can ever do in there*. And like that's what I'm very focused on. I'm never planning my next questions. I'm never thinking in the future. *I'm very present*. I got that solely from Equine.

P6: I like the advanced class more. I feel like it was more about how to be a therapist, and how to work with clients. I think for the second class, it helped me to be more open, especially with clients. *It helped me to really learn how to be in the moment, and how to be present*, and not have all of these crazy thoughts about what question to ask, or, what activity am I going to do. But just to be there, and to appreciate, that specific moment.

Professional Skills. Nelson et al. (2007) explained that professional skills are “How MFTs conduct therapy” (p. 422). That is, “these skills are the activities and attitudes of the therapist related to providing MFT, including professional development and identity” (Nelson et al.) As related to the sub-themes of *Professional Development*, *Personal Development*, and *Beliefs about Professional Identity Development*, I suspect personal development systemically creates change in the participants’ professional advancement through courses such as I-EAFT and A-EAFT, which seem pivotal for self-of-the-therapist reflexivity.

Professional Development. This sub-theme developed from the participants’ accounts of their lived experiences of professional enhancement. The following excerpts

depict how the participants in this study associate their experience with EARL to the development of their professional identity.

P1: In the intro course, for myself, it felt more... *I was like maybe 60-70% client and 30% therapist.* The purpose of the class wasn't that I was a client, but I felt that I was a client. I was finding my own answers to questions that were brought up in the Intro to Equine course. *In the advanced course, I would say the percentages for me shift to like 40, where I felt like the client. And then 60 where I felt like the therapist.*

P1 utilized percentages to display the perceived shift from a personal focus in the I-EAFT course to a professional focus in the A-EAFT course. In the I-EAFT course, they felt more like the client because when questions in class would arise, they would reflect on them from a personal focus. P3 explained they saw working with the horses as a benefit to their clinical practice. Their motivation to continue on with the A-EAFT course was fueled by their desire to continue learning about themselves and how to be with clients. In both excerpts, the EAFT courses are being connected to the professional growth development of the participants.

P3: *I decided to continue on with equine assisted relational learning because I had seen the benefit that I had gained and all the ways I learned to interact with clients and seeing myself utilize those in the room. I wanted to continue learning about who I am as a person, as a therapist, and then being able to see what I'm bringing to the horses and how I can then bring that to my clients.*

In the responses below, participants explain how EARL is connected to their professional development. Through an equine assisted activity, P2 gained insight about

their support system and its importance in helping them accomplish their goals. Over time, the I-EAFT and A-EAFT classes helped P2 further the development of their professional self.

P2: The egg activity [see below for an explanation] was more like the support system. So, figuring out who was there for you, which I realized how important the support system is, my relationship with my parents, with my partner, and how they do help get you to this position. *So every activity brought up a conversation about an important aspect of being a therapist. From the first class, the second class just builds up on us as professionals.*

The egg activity, as referred to in the excerpt above, is modeled after an activity developed by Tracie Faa- Thompson (2012) called “You Gotta Crack a Few Eggs,” in which a participant is asked to write on a hard-boiled egg something which they cherish. The participant is then asked to attach the egg somewhere on the horse in a way that the egg will not fall or be crushed. Once the egg is attached to the horse, the participant leads the horse through a pre-designed obstacle course while attempting to ensure that the egg stays attached to the horse without preventing it from falling.

P3 described their thought process regarding their foundational development as a therapist. They also attributed the quickness of the development of their professional identity to the I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses. P3 emphasized their continual ability to check on themselves personally and professionally.

P3: So Advanced for me was interesting because of when I took it. At the time I started Advanced, I think I had had such a great foundation of who I was starting to believe I was as a therapist now in this field. I already started to think about and

understand what my values and beliefs are, how do I apply them, how do I bring them into who I am and how I interact with others. *I think having that self as a therapist piece early on going into advanced allowed me just to continue to build on that in a much more developed manner.* I was able to really home in and kind of ground myself in my model and my perspective very quickly. And so, then going through Advanced, I just continued to look at those things to reflect on those things and *see where else am I noticing the isomorphic nature of who I am as a person versus who I am as a family therapist.*

P4's motivation for enrolling in the A-EAFT course was the desire to work on personal issues and to gain an understanding about themselves as a clinician. P4 noted that there are very few experiential opportunities that encourage students to reflect and to work on being a clinician:

P4: Well it took a long time for me to take the advanced course. I was going through a lot of things personally. *This class really helped me work out all my personal issues and really helped me tease out who I am as a clinician.* I used this class to think about all those things, take in all the readings and all the horses. I was there with a different purpose, and different intention. I thought, "I'd like to know more about this, there's an opportunity to do more and what a perfect time to deal with all of this other stuff that we don't really get an opportunity to do in the program." There is no self-help course, there is no self-care course, *there isn't a lot that helps you to reflect or work out the things that you want to work out as a clinician, as a human being, as a woman, except for this type of experiential course.*

They further elaborated:

P4: I realized that throughout the different activities in the advanced course, I would go into it thinking about things in a personal way, about how they were relating to my life, or helping me heal or helping me work things out within myself. *I never would have thought about who I was in that way, had it not been for the experiences that happened with the horses. I was going into it [the activities] with those personal ideas and then I would think about myself as a clinician simultaneously.* That's what the experiential activities would bring up. I would reflect and then I'd read back on those reflections.

P5 further illustrates the belief that learning about the personal self is connected to learning of the professional self. P5 attributed their clinical confidence to the personal and professional growth developed while experiencing EARL. P5 emphasized that they identified their weakness and worked on enhancing these skills while continuing to build on their strengths.

P5: *Equine helped me understand me as a whole person. I feel like it made me more of who I am and allowed me to be more of who I am and to grow in the areas that were lacking. And really strengthened the skills I was already strong in. I'm a better person than I was before I took the classes, and I feel like it all kind of worked together to make me a more confident clinician.*

Personal Development. Another sub-theme related to the AAMFT core competency sub-domain Professional Skills comes from the participants' accounts of their lived experiences of personal development. This sub-theme was represented by self-

reports of how the Stable Place workforce associated their experience with EARL to the development of their professional identity.

P5: I did not like having to trust other people to tell me where to go and where I was safe, to have all of my issues be so revealed. But obviously I was learning something, and there was a shift for me. *I wasn't willing to be vulnerable in front of other people and I was like, "How am I gonna be a therapist if I can't even connect with a horse?" And so that was a huge realization for me and a shift.*

P5 described the shift which occurred for them when the realization struck that they were refraining from being open with others. P5 further emphasized their thought process of relating lack of rapport with a horse to struggling with being a therapist and connecting to clients. The following passage from P5 further elaborates on this realization and illustrates how this participant worked on building connections in a personal context with the horse, which they related to how they can use these skills as a clinician.

P5: Another moment that was really meaningful for me was when I connected with Casper [one of the horses]. It was one of those "just be with the horse" activities, and I was very focused on that, just like being in the moment and not getting distracted with the horsey stuff. That was part of the release; I wasn't trying to do anything other than something different. Trying to learn something different by being with the animal. I got really, really close and put my ear right there to try to listen to the breathing and then it was one of those things that once we connected, we moved together. It was like when I started to walk, he would follow me instead of me pulling on the lead rope. *I was kind of experimenting with the horses and trying out different things to make a connection when I*

realized I needed to shift how I approached the horse, which I related to how I approached clients.

P6, P4 and P3 also discussed how they were connecting learning about their personal self through EARL to how they presented as an MFT.

P6: The thing that started off for me as uncomfortable is also something that pushed me forward. *I don't think I realized that until after both of these classes. I never want to be uncomfortable*, so I've always shied away from things that make me nervous, or where I could be embarrassed, or people could judge me. But then, I guess, I never really accepted that part of myself until these classes. And now obviously I still don't like to do it, but I still push myself more. Currently, I'm in an uncomfortable situation, but I'm still here and thriving. So, I think *it opened my eyes to just being accepting of that and acknowledging that's just a part of my personality. But still challenging myself to my comfort level in my uncomfortableness, if that makes sense.*

P6 described noticing a change in how they approach situations that elicit emotions of discomfort, nervousness and embarrassment. This observation developed from engaging in equine activities while classmates observed. This was uncomfortable for the participant, and although they believe they may have performed better in a one-on-one atmosphere, the setting pushed them out of their comfort zone, something they continue to challenge themselves with. P6 further elaborated on learning to merge their personal self with their professional self. Furthermore, they identified that allowing their authentic self to be present in the therapy room is now acceptable:

P6: No way was this experience problematic. I feel like it's helped me leaps and bounds. One thing that I will say that it *helped me with is, merging my professional self and my personal self*. And I know that that's something that I struggled with in BTI. But I almost can't be so professional if I'm around the horses, because I'm so giddy, I just love it. So it's *helped me to realize that I don't have to be so proper and so stark. Like, I can have fun*. That has helped me with this current job. It would help me in any job that I do, from here on out. Just to know that, you can *let your personality come through, and it's not going to be a bad thing*.

In the following two passages, P4 focused on how their involvement with EARL encouraged them to have multiple perspectives, which they allude to as life changing.

P4: *I had to learn a new language, because my culture, and my upbringing, and my own expectations of myself taught me to be one way and it worked*. This hadn't failed me yet. It pushed me to be the best version of myself. I don't want to be mediocre within myself, so this was a great model to live by. *Experiencing success that looks different was just like, "Oh, this is possible?"* The horses really do that. We can talk about it till we're blue in the face, but it's one thing when we're doing it, when we're struggling, when we did it! All those things stick to you physically and then stay with you, they linger, they mean something else down the line, that stuff you can't teach. *It was learning that there were other possibilities of accomplishing things, of getting through life, of going through clinical work, of helping people, of being present. I had no idea this was possible*.

P4 described how their culture, upbringing, and personal expectations provided them with one framework of how to be successful, which was vastly different than what they learned from the horses. They elaborated on the thought process of experiencing success differently and how those sensations lingered. Similarly, in the following excerpt, P4 provides another example of how EARL altered their perspective of what was important to focus on, which created change in their personal and professional self. P4 identified that in their personal life, they were focused on finishing the task and missing what was important. Having this realization changed their perspective of their therapeutic focus.

P4: Advanced class was the first time in my life that I could give it my best and have that be enough. Ever. I've always been an overachiever my entire life. My own expectations of myself have always been that. *And then this course just like forced me to be okay with not finishing [activities]. It forced me to be okay with things not going as planned. We were paying attention to what's important versus the task, which I hadn't been paying attention to in my life at all because I was focused on needing to finish school.* This changed my goal as a therapist. Clients come in with, "I want to feel better, I want to do better, I want this to be different." And so, I'm so much more interested in, "OK, between this point and that point, like what can we do here in this in between place?" I'm much more interested in process.

Like others, P3 related personal exploration and growth to their clinical identity. P3 portrays how concepts picked up through EARL cross over into their day to day life, such as flexibility and self-reflection. The participant explained how their reflective

thought process has shifted from over-analyzing to self-acceptance, and how maintaining mindfulness and being present has assisted with their ability to be flexible.

P3: I think the first one for me would probably be *flexibility*. *I have always been the type that if I set expectations for myself and I don't meet those, I am like very depressed and down on myself. I have a very low self-esteem when I don't match those expectations and I really noticed a change in myself in my ability to be flexible and not maintain expectations.* If I do have expectations, they are malleable. I can move them or shape them differently, so it's not a detriment to my wellbeing overall. So, I think that would probably be like one of the main things that I've taken from the work and applied to my day to day. Another thing that I think I've done is that piece about *self-reflecting*. *I notice I'm constantly processing and constantly reflecting on the work I do or how I interact with people. That's something that at times used to get me down a rabbit hole and I wouldn't stop thinking about it and I would just spiral. But I've noticed now I can do that in a way where I'm thinking about it or reflecting, but then it's not something that's impacting me negatively. I can stop it at some point and say, "Okay, this is what I learned, and this is what I could do differently."* I'm not going on and on and on and just staying in that space. I think that those would be two of the main things. Kind of just that appreciation for an acceptance of myself and who I am as well as the ability to understand how to be flexible and how to adapt to situations while being mindful and present are definitely things that I've taken from my work as an equine therapist into bringing to my day to day.

Beliefs about Professional Identity Development. The sub-theme includes participants' opinions about self of the therapist work, their belief that learning about the personal self is connected to how a therapist develops, and what is most authentic in the professional context. This sub-theme is connected to the AAMFT core-competency subdomain Professional Skills. The following excerpts illustrate how strongly the staff from Stable Place believe EARL has provided them a solid foundation and safe place to grow and practice developing their therapeutic identity.

P1: I put a lot of emphasis on the equine work in my development as a therapist. Having me recognize different thoughts and feelings, and emotions that I could have not only in my professional life, but [also] in my personal life. Though it was an elective, *it's something that other courses could not offer, in my mind: the skill of, "Feel it, think it, what are you thinking about right now?"*

P1 expressed that, through EARL, they reflected on their personal and professional life in a way that encouraged them to reflect on their thought process, unlike any other course offered. P1 thus placed a lot of emphasis on the role EARL played in the development of their clinical identity. P2, P5, and P6 corroborated that I-EAFT and A-EAFT are the only courses in the MFT program that offer students the opportunity to self-reflect in an experiential manner. In the excerpt below, P2 suggests that the I-EAFT course should be a required course as it provides students the opportunity to self-reflect differently than other classes.

P2: I think it should be a required class, honestly, at least the Intro. I think it's an important class because *there's not another class that you self-reflect in. And view into your soul and who you are,* and like building the little pieces of puzzle that at

the end of the two year program, end up being who I am because of all of the equine classes I took, and all the experiences that just molded together. *There's not [another] class that [gave] me this experiential experience.*

In the following two passages, P5 and P6 make a similar point: EARL was their only opportunity to connect personal growth to their professional self.

P5: Every other class is just you learning information. I mean it's all mental-health related, but it's not personal. *I don't know how people learn how to be a therapist without the equine classes. I don't know how they know anything about themselves.* Or like when it comes to their thinking about doing Clinical Portfolio [a doctoral-level clinical exam] without doing [Equine]: How do they know? Like that's such a crazy question to ask someone that hasn't taken these classes, of like, "Who are you as a person and what model fits for you?" *Nothing [else] is as personal or . . . [gives] enough time to be as self-reflective.* With the horses, there's an honesty: You can't really lie to yourself for very long.

Furthermore, P6 amplified the recognition that in the EAFT classes, concepts were experienced rather than simply discussed.

P6: Well, we had to journal for every class. And I'm like, ugh, but like, *Equine was the only class where I was out there and actually experiencing things.* I wasn't just sitting there and thinking about, okay these are my values, this is what I'm biased about. Instead, it was like, a live action thing, which was really cool. *And I could not have gotten that experience in any other class. I think you need to learn about yourself as a person, first, before you learn about yourself as a therapist.* And I think Equine helped me with that a lot.

Learning Through Reflection

The second master theme originated from how interviewees related their study of family therapy skills to clinical application through reflecting on their lived experience with EARL during their time in the I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses and as Stable Place personnel. The sub-themes that surfaced are related to the participants demonstrating their knowledge of family therapy concepts and systemic thinking through intentional behaviors, providing examples of how they conceptualized the information they were collecting through a systemic lens, as well as examples of moments when the participants assessed themselves and the experiential work. These perspectives are connected with the Conceptual, Perceptual, and Evaluative Skill subdomains of the AAMFT Core Competencies.

Conceptual Skills. According to Nelson et al. (2007), conceptual skills are “What MFTs know” (p. 422). This AAMFT Core Competencies subdomain implies, “These skills demonstrate knowledge and familiarity with family therapy models and their concepts, system theories and thinking, and an awareness of the therapist as an agent of change” (Nelson et al.). In relation to the emergent sub-themes (conceptualization and incorporating theory), I understood the connection to be about how MFT concepts are being demonstrated through intentional behaviors and systemic thinking as related to EARL.

Conceptualization. The sub-theme *conceptualization* was developed through an observation regarding how MFT concepts were being discussed as intentional behaviors. This theme emerged as the participants reflected on their experiences of the I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses and their time working with Stable Place.

P1: *It's not that cookie cutter and cut and dry. Every client's different. So, with learning the theories of Equine, and then introducing it to clients, I found that it was more helpful to be flexible.*

P1 connected what they learned in equine courses to how they need to engage with their clients. In the above citation, P1 is demonstrating the systemic concept that every client is different by employing the intentional behavior of being flexible. This also displays the understanding that a therapist is not an outsider in the system but rather an agent of change. Similarly, in the passage below, P2 suggested that it is important to have experienced the equine work, as it helps them to understand what they should be focusing on when working with clients. The response from P2 was delivered after being asked about how they would describe the transition from learning about EAFT to applying the concepts clinically.

P2: *I realized how much harder it is to be on the therapist side, because you know that only one question can open up so many emotions. It's amazing that the program is where you need to take the first two classes, and you are experiencing what your client might experience. That's like an important key. Because if you don't know, then I'm pretty sure you'll end up doing therapy in a totally different way. But you were also a client, and now you know to look at the verbal [and] non-verbal communications, to note, "Hey he is really in the moment right now, like don't ask the question, something is going on up there."*

Recognizing that a therapist is an agent of change, P2 identifies how one question can open up many different emotions, which they connect to the importance of paying attention to verbal and non-verbal communications.

P5: In practicum this term, my client was dealing with a lot of serious issues and if I didn't have any experience with them, I would have thought they would have been scary to deal with. *But through Equine, I've learned how valuable just having someone willing to be with you and sit with you and not rush you is. I think that's a gift, one for me to have learned.*

P5 similarly commented on how powerful it is to allow the client to lead the session and to refrain from rushing them along in their process. Below, P6 described how important it is for the therapist to utilize what the client, as well as the horse and the therapist, brings into the session.

P6: I still think therapy is about using what your client gives you. And kind of just taking into consideration what you're bringing to the session as well, to kind of have that experiential portion of it. Because essentially, with the horses, you're taking what the horse is giving; you're taking what the client's giving; you're taking what you're giving and utilizing it in the session.

Incorporating Theory. Another sub-theme, which is related to the AAMFT core competency sub-domain Conceptual Skills, emerged from the participants' accounts of how they connected theories and concepts with their clinical work.

P3: Stable Place emphasizes a very non-judgmental, non-expert, stance, *highlighting those solution-focused tenets* of "let's look for strengths, resources, how can we apply these things, you know, for our clients." But I see that being part of what we do even with each other, is let me highlight my co-therapist's strengths, let me highlight my co-therapist's resources and let's collaborate and build and grow together. I see that with the equine specialists as well, but they are

coming from a more expert stance. I think they tend to bring an expert perspective at times to the greater culture. So, I think when you bring us all together, we end up being very *collaborative*.

P3 demonstrated knowledge and familiarity with systems theories by identifying how Stable Place operates from a non-pathologizing and person-centered perspective with clients and staff. P3 emphasized collaboration as a part of the Stable Place culture. I see an isomorphic pattern between how EAFT therapists practice therapy and how they interact with one another within the organization. P3 further confirms this by again defining what they believe are the basics of EAFT, which include being open and flexible and taking a non-expert stance. P3 shared that their experience with EARL has shaped how they practice therapy and will continue to inform their clinical process going forward.

P3: I think the work that I have been lucky enough to do out at the barn has really influenced how I will practice for the rest of my life or the rest of my career. I've been able to understand different populations of people [and] different presenting problems in such a unique way that [it] has allowed me to *constantly be open and flexible with my practice*. And I think that's something that I'll always be able to take with me, even if I don't have the means to do this work. I'm always going to be able to take those founding principles of our work out at the barn and constantly apply those: The aspect of "there is no right or wrong." Because there isn't. You know, I'm, *I'm operating from a non-expert stance* whether I'm out at the barn or in the room. So being able to practice those things the way we are now I think has really ingrained them into who I am in the room.

P4 and P5 identified how learning through EARL assisted with establishing confidence when connecting theory to clinical application. P4 learned to shift their focus from the content of the session to the process their clients are engaged in. They now put less of an emphasis on finishing a task with their clients, spending more time exploring what is occurring in the client's system.

P4: The biggest lesson that I learned was that it is *more about process than about content*. I learned that finishing the activity didn't matter as much as what was happening throughout it. I learned that I didn't have to complete the activity to make it powerful.

In the following exemplar, P5 identified that taking the EAFT courses assisted them in thinking systemically:

P5: Equine has been huge in helping me just think systemically. In terms of so much always going on out here [at the barn] and so that's been really cool. *That's been like a giant metaphor for everything that I'm learning in terms of there being so many subsystems and, there's no linear causality, there's no IP.*

Perceptual Skills. Perceptual skills are “what MFTs perceive or discern. These skills provide for the interpretation of data through paradigmatic and conceptual lenses and tie theory or conceptual skills to what is happening in the client system” (Nelson et al., 2007, p. 422). This connects to the sub-theme *Data Interpretation*, which has to do with how the participants, influenced by EARL, use their conceptual lens to interpret data.

Data Interpretation. The sub-theme *Data Interpretation* was developed through the analysis of the responses from the semi-structured interviews highlighting how

working with horses assisted the participants in understanding the therapeutic process from multiple perspectives and how to respond accordingly.

P1: After experiencing the theories with clients, it wasn't as cut and dry. You really had to meet the client where they were. *The client could be going through whatever. The first time a client comes in, they might not be open to talking about obstacles they have, or the different things that are difficult for them, much less with someone who they've just met. Even if it's the therapist-client relationship. Some things for some people are difficult to talk about with anybody.* I myself learned that not everybody is ready to talk about whatever activity we have planned that day. And whatever they bring in that day is what they bring in that day.

P1 identified the importance of the MFT concept of not pushing the client, but rather leading from one step behind. P3 similarly recognized that knowing how to work with a client is dependent on understanding their perspective:

P3: I think each of the activities out at the barn are so impactful because you put yourself in the client's shoes. So even if you don't have an "ah-ha moment" yourself, I think what's helpful about the activities in the classes is just that you're able to start relating what's going on for you at the barn to how your client might experience it. I think being able to walk in say a client's shoes allows you to get a better perspective and understanding of what you're asking your clients to do. Whether it's out at the barn or in the room. At the very least *it allows me to understand what my client's experience could be like and then how should I, as a therapist, be mindful of those things and maybe tailor what I'm asking my clients*

to do in a way that allows them to feel safe while being vulnerable, just as I was having to do in the classes.

P4 learned patience and acceptance from their equine work—how not to be organized by an agenda or a rush to help.

P4: I let the client know “I’m not here to make anything be different for you.”

Everyone around them [is] pushing them to get better and to feel better, and everyone wants them to stop being depressed and crying. *What would that mean for their friends who died? What would that mean for their memory? What would it mean for the client to move on so quickly? To go to prom, to graduate high school, to move on and to leave all this behind? I’m in no rush to make the client move away from that.*

In their interview, P4 explained their work with a client who had experienced significant loss, and although everyone in their support system wanted the person to heal, they were not taking into consideration what that would mean for the person who was experiencing the grief. This example portrays how P4’s respectful therapeutic engagement related to how they conceptualized the case. P4 additionally describes what they focus on when conceptualizing their clients’ experience.

P4: It’s the in-between stuff that is rich. *It’s the stuff the client doesn’t say that they go home thinking about that is really transformative.* If we didn’t complete the activity, [then] “What does that feel like for somebody?”, “How does this translate?” So *it was about translating the process of the activities, and having the client take away whatever they wanted rather than what I thought they should take.*

Evaluative Skills. Nelson et al. (2007) suggested that evaluative skills are “How MFTs assess what they have done” (p. 422). This grouping indicates, “These skills are the process of assessing and appraising the effectiveness of therapeutic activities and the therapist” (Nelson et al.). The sub-themes of *self-assessment* and *experiential nature* show how the participants reflected on the effectiveness and process of their clinical work and EARL.

Self-Assessment. This sub-theme emerged as participants shared their reflections on the work they performed and their observations of self-growth. This sub-theme is connected to the AAMFT core-competency subdomain Evaluative Skills, which have to do with assessing one’s own therapeutic effectiveness.

P1: *Whenever I first started seeing clients for myself, I had to actively think about, “All right. I have to do this. We have to be open. Go back to the horse. Push them a little bit here. Let them be silent here.” So, it felt like I was learning a skill, but the skill was still fresh. So, I had to actively think about what I was doing, how to do it. . . . And if it’s not helpful, let’s step back. Whereas whenever I got more experience, the techniques, the thoughts came more effortlessly, where I didn’t have to actively think about it.*

Through ongoing self-assessment, P1 was able to recognize what changed over time as they gained experience and confidence. P3 also noted self-assessed changes that began early in their education and carried on through the advanced class and beyond.

P3: *I think the best way of encompassing how I went through Advanced was just constantly looking at what is isomorphic about who I am in the room and who I am outside of the room. And then how do I bring those together when I work with*

the horses and *what does that mean for when I work with my clients?* I think because of me taking both of the classes early on in my training, I very quickly and continuously brought those things into the room and noticed myself utilizing those things. For example, I was very quickly noticing how I would use what the client brings in the room, like we would utilize what we do with the horses out at the barn. So I was very *quickly being able to utilize my client's strengths or notice those things, always focused on the process or what's going on differently, rather than maybe the content or the complaint of the problem or the issue.* So I think that really benefited my training because I very quickly was able to notice and recognize things that helped me in the room.

P3's self-assessment also helped them recognize and reflect on how they were more comfortable engaging in a non-traditional therapy setting than in a typical, more formal, therapeutic atmosphere.

P3: *When I was in the room, I found myself rushing, getting flustered, getting lost in having to have an objective or a goal, where out at the barn I didn't necessarily have that.* [At the barn,] I'm able to be in a place where I'm okay with whatever happens, happens. I'm gonna have to be flexible, I'm gonna have to just roll with the punches with, you know, taking what I'm given at that moment and utilizing it. But for some reason, *then translating back into the therapy room, it was very difficult for me to figure out how to do that without a horse or how to do that with those four walls around me.* And so, for me definitely pacing as well as being able to not hold onto that goal so tightly became a challenge when in the therapy room. Out at the barn you see movement almost immediately, so *it was*

*hard for me to see lack of movement in the therapy room and then determine what to do next. Where out at the barn we could have no movement, a ton of movement, but I always knew what to do next 'cause I'm always relating it back to the horse, I'm always relating it back to something behavioral the client did. Um, something that was going on in that moment, which I think *without having that, um, experiential or hands-on piece made it very difficult for me to, um, understand how to then practice in the room.**

P5 discussed their assessment of their ability to join with clients and their uncertainty of how that translated into groups.

P5: I think I started with the substance abuse groups and they were big groups of people. And so, there was a couple of us interns and [a staff therapist] running them. And that was overwhelming because I was like, there is just so many people out there. I was like, how do you manage all those people? How do you remember their names? How do you know what questions to ask? *In the first class I realized that my weakness was that I didn't know how to connect with someone.* And then the class really, really helped me do that and so when I went into my first practicum in the master's program, my feedback was "you join with your clients really, really well and you're always just in the moment with them. Like you're just talking with them and that's all you're interested in doing and you're not thinking about your next question." *I learned how to connect with one person really, really well. And so, learning how to do the groups, I realized I wanted to get into a side conversation with one person and have a one-on-one talk. Learning how to zoom out took a while.*

Experiential Nature. The last sub-theme to surface had to do with the experiential nature of the work and how it was helpful in the learning process. Many of participants expressed the significance that experiential learning had on their clinical development.

P3: I think also seeing the experiential nature, *the hands-on nature of clients being able to change and do something different in the moment also made it impactful. I think that allowed me to see how offering things such as homework (when in the room) gives clients something to do, to try, to expand upon.* This became something that I was constantly seeking and looking forward to. [At the barn,] I was seeing experiential work be done and within a couple sessions these clients were having impactful sessions and experiences that helped them change quite quickly, and then I go into . . . [a regular therapy] room and I have the same number of sessions and we're still having the same conversations and [I'm] saying to myself, "Well how can I have that same thing [that happens at the barn] happen in the room?"

P3 and P4 discussed how they assessed the observed impact of EARL. In the above passage, P3 discussed noticing how quickly change occurred when an experiential component was incorporated in the therapy. P4 expressed that having an experience connects with people in a concrete way, as a physical association is made. P4 learned how to become the therapist they are through the experiential work.

P4: *The experience helps you to make your ideas tangible. It manifests them in a physical way and that helps you to learn.* Anything that's experiential teaches you in a different way than when you hear a lecture, or you read a chapter: something kinetic about the learning that sticks with you in a way that something else might

not. *I discovered who I was, what I wanted to do in the room, what kind of therapist I am, and what I lean towards by physically doing things at the barn.*

Discovery is exciting and different from choosing something; it's not preplanned.

There's something to discovering and that's the kind of learning that happens out at the barn and in the world. *There's something about experiencing the lesson, versus learning it in a different way, that is hard to unlearn. It's hard to forget.*

Summary

While learning about MFT and the theoretical models, participants chose the opportunity to further engage in an experiential course, which focused on the dynamics and practice of EAFT. Through this study, I observed the learning process the students engaged in was centered around the practice of intensive self-reflection, which focused on their experiences of working with horses known as EARL. This reflection process was observed to occur in two different fashions which further assisted in my understanding of how the participants were relating these experiences to their clinical work and how they were connecting the skills taught in the MFT program to clinical applications.

The findings of this study indicate through the experiential courses and the position at Stable Place, participants had personal realizations which gave them food for thought when reflecting on their professional selves. Through self-reflection, the participants were able to verbalize how EARL impacted their therapeutic process by developing insight into their personal and professional selves. Participants were able to verbalize how they interacted with their clients, how they worked on improving themselves, how they conceptualized and interpreted data received by their clients, and how they assessed themselves in a professional context. This was further displayed by

the connections made between the emerged sub themes and the AAMFT core competency subdomains.

In Chapter V, I make connections between the results of this study and the limited existing research on generalized EAL. I offer a detailed discussion on the master themes, sub themes, and how they connected with PD and the AAMFT core-competency subdomains. I identify the strengths and limitations of the study and offer suggestions for future studies in order to expand upon this body of research. I then discuss its implications and relevance for the future education of family therapists.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was intended to explore how graduate students who enrolled in and completed the I-EAFT course, the A-EAFT course, and were clinical staff at Stable Place made sense of their lived experience and how, if at all, they related these experiences to their own professional development. By interviewing six master's level and doctoral level, non-licensed marriage and family therapists, I was able to document original findings of the implications for EARL on self-of-the-therapist development and expand the limited research available on the use of EAL. This study presented a derivative of EAL informed by EAFT, known as EARL, and illustrated how EARL can be utilized as an alternative method of supervision for marriage and family therapy students.

I conducted this study with the hopes of being able to offer the field of marriage and family therapy an alternative method of supervision for MFT students. The transcripts from the six semi-structured interviews I facilitated encompassed copious amounts of data that illuminated how master's and doctoral level therapists attributed their personal and professional growth and development to EARL. I endeavored to maintain the participants' perspective of their experience while interpreting their original words during the IPA process.

In my review of the existing literature in Ch II, I considered the findings of previous research to explore the generalized notion of EAL and the impact it made on the lives of the participants. In some ways, the participants in the current study have reiterated what was found in these other studies. For example, their lived experiences illustrate the previous findings that individuals who engage in EAL are able to identify personal and professional growth through self-reflection (Dell et al., 2008; Epston, 2011;

Giraldez Carter, 2015; Kelly, 2014; Pendry & Roeter, 2013). Furthermore, this study exemplifies the assertion made by Akella (2010), “The term learning from experience really means learning from reflection on experience” (p.101), which is precisely what the participants discussed throughout the study.

The results of this research also supported the findings of Giraldez Carter (2015), who indicated that students who had taken the I-EAFT course were experiencing personal and professional growth as they gained personal awareness. However, this study captured the perspectives of six individuals fully immersed in EARL through education, clinical experience, and supervision. Subsequently, I utilized the AAMFT Core Competencies sub-domains as a method to connect the emergent themes from the analysis with the professional and educational requirements of MFTs, as set forth by the AAMFT. Once the emergent themes were clear, I made the connection of each master and sub theme to the definitions of the AAMFT core competency sub-domains (Nelson et al., 2007). The results illustrated how the six participants, through an intensive self-reflection process focused on their experiences with the horses, connected EARL to their personal and professional development, based on how they interacted with their clients, how they made sense of their experiences, how they conceptualized and interpreted data from clients, and how they assessed their growth and experiential work. Most importantly, this study indicates that the use of EARL is a practical form of learning about one’s personal and professional self.

Discussion

The following table offers a concise view of how I conceptualized the emergent master themes and sub-themes, as well as how they can be linked to the AAMFT sub-

domains. The more I analyzed the transcripts, the more I began to understand that although there were multiple sub-themes emerging, there was also a larger pattern developing regarding how the lived experiences were being understood. I was able to understand these patterns by utilizing a three-column chart (themes, transcripts, self-reflective journaling) which over time evolved into the Table displayed below. The self-reflective journaling column evolved into the organization of the field notes/comments column, which can be seen in IPA Data Set chart (Appendix B).

Table 2. *Sample of IPA Data Set*

EARL	Master Themes	Sub-Themes	Transcript	Field Notes/ Comments	Sub-Domains	
EARL	Relational Threads	Relational Responses		Master Theme: Sub-Theme: Sub-Domain: Reason: Linguistic: Descriptive: Conceptual:	Executive Skills	
		Be in the Moment, Be Present			Professional Skills	
		Professional Development				
		Personal Development				
	Learning Through Reflection	Beliefs about Professional Identity Development				Conceptual Skills
		Conceptualization				
		Incorporating Theory				Perceptual Skills
		Data Interpretation				
		Self-Assessment				Evaluative Skills
		Experiential Nature				

The first column in the chart is titled EARL because I understood this type of learning to be the foundational lens through which the study participants were able to

relate and reflect back on their lived experiences. EARL has been connected with how the participants related their experience in the EAFT courses and their employment at Stable Place with the growth and development of their personal and professional selves through self- reflection. However, I realized these connections were being made through different reflective processes, which is how the master themes were established.

The second column of the chart is the master themes, *Relational Threads* and *Learning Through Reflection*. These master themes reflect the process of how the lived experiences of the interviewees are being understood. They illuminate how EARL was related to their experiences of clinical work and how they learned to connect MFT skills taught in the MFT program to clinical applications. The participants in this study discussed how, through self-reflection, they connected EARL to their personal development, which was interrelated to their professional development. Skovolt and Ronnestad (1992) explained that continuous self-reflection is the essential method of PD and maintaining a reflective stance is of utmost importance while the individual is consciously giving time and energy to processing significant experiences.

In the master theme *Relational Threads*, the reflective stance (Skovolt & Ronnestad, 1992) observed in two different ways. First, the participant reflects on how they related what they learned about themselves personally to their professional selves. Then they discussed how this knowledge related to the work they perform when with a client. For example, P5 discussed how forming a connection with a client was difficult due to starting the program with a guarded demeanor.

P5: I did not like having to trust other people to tell me where to go and where I was safe, to have all of my issues be so revealed. But obviously I was learning

something, and there was a shift for me. *I wasn't willing to be vulnerable in front of other people and I was, like, "How am I gonna be a therapist if I can't even connect with a horse?"* And so that was a huge realization for me and a shift.

Later in the interview, P5 shared the differences they see in themselves from where they started to how they worked, currently. For example, when P5 was asked about clinical skills they believe they excel in, this was offered:

P5: I'm comparing my work now to like when I first started; now, *I'm patient. I'm transparent. I'm aware of giving my client honest feedback, of forming that connection with them. I'm a safe place.* That's like the biggest thing, that I'm willing to be that person if a connection is what they need. I'm willing and I think able to be all those things for my client.

The master theme *Learning Through Reflection* is the epitome of the reflective stance as explained by Skovolt and Ronnestad (1992). The sub-themes connected to this master theme illustrate how, through reflection on their work, the participants related their study of family therapy theories to clinical application. For example,

P3: I think, first and foremost, equine assisted relational learning allowed me to see isomorphism and the importance of that. *I can only bring myself into the room.* Just like I can only bring myself out to the barn and as we always say to clients, the horse reflects that to us. So, who I am out at the barn is who I'm gonna be in the room. *And so being able to see and understand myself isomorphic to my model allowed me to then be able to better my understanding of theory, to better understand my practice.* Um, so I think that would probably be the main thing. Is

that isomorphic piece, being able to see what connects with you with what you're doing and how that is communicated.

The above excerpt was connected with the sub-theme Conceptualization, as P3 explained the MFT concept of isomorphism and how they learned they can only be themselves, even in the therapy room. P3 discussed learning how they connected with the model that informs their professional stance, which was helpful in deepening their understanding of the model and how to best practice it.

Another example of *Learning through Reflection* can be seen through the explanation of P4 regarding how they reflected on their time with the horses while working with a client in a traditional therapy setting. P4 described how equine-related learning has come into their clinical practice, whether they are at the barn or not.

P4: I remember thinking about the things that the horses did whilst in the room with a client. I'm always thinking about how this would be different at the barn; everything is seen through an experiential lens. *I think differently about the in-between stuff because of the horses. I'm super fascinated by "What is this? This that you're talking to me about. Even though we're not in your problem, you're talking to me about it and I'm so fascinated by your response or your thinking or how you see things or your assumptions."* I just can't un-see the world like this. So, everything is colored by Equine.

The third column in the chart depicts the sub-themes which emerged from analyzing the transcripts, whereas the fourth column is the actual excerpts from which the sub-themes were developed. The fifth column in the chart illustrates how I conceptualized the excerpts and, as stated above, this column has evolved throughout the

study. The final column in the chart consists of the AAMFT sub-domains, which are connected to how EARL upholds the professional and educational requirements of MFTs. In order to better comprehend this study's contribution to the existing literature on MFT graduate student professional development, it is important to discuss its strengths and limitations.

Strengths of the Study

The principal strength of this study was the use of IPA, which was utilized to design the protocol and analyze the lived experiences of the study participants. As previously discussed, IPA is comprised of three different schools of philosophical knowledge: phenomenology—the study of experience; hermeneutics—how something is interpreted; and ideography—understanding the meaning of an experience from a specific and generalized perspective (Smith et al., 2009). Due to this methodological choice, I was able to shift between the original meaning of the collected data and my interpretation of that meaning. The “hermeneutic turn” (p. 34) allowed me to investigate the lived experiences of graduate students by asking questions about specific experiences then analyzing and making sense of those experiences within the context from which they came. Furthermore, I was able to take these individual experiences and connect them with the discourse in its entirety to look for patterns across the individual experiences.

Another important strength of the study is the group of graduate students employed by Stable Place as an intern or staff therapist. Through my personal involvement with Stable Place, I was able to recruit six participants who engaged in EARL on all available levels (I-EAFT, A-EAFT, and employment). Through these conversations with the participants and because of their honesty, I was able to procure a

body of illustrative data from which the study results emerged. The participants in this study do not represent all MFT graduate students who have encountered EARL.

However, their lived experiences will resonate with future students interested in learning more about who they are as family therapists. The inclusion of both doctoral- and master's-level therapists adds to the implication of these outcomes and allows for different stimulating questions to be asked that could guide future studies.

I believe another strength of this study was the focus on the professional development of graduate level MFT students who have gone through all possible levels of EARL (I, A, Internship, Staff). Maintaining this concentration allowed me to understand the isomorphism believed to exist between the professional self and the personal self. In the following excerpt, P3 illustrated this connection by describing an activity that was facilitated in the A-EAFT course. The activity prompted P3 to simultaneously think about both their personal and professional beliefs.

P3: I remember very early on one of the first things we did in advanced class is we drew a line on a paper and had one side being, "What are your values and beliefs as a person?" and then, "What are your values and beliefs as you think about what you know about family therapy?" "And what's important to you as a family therapist or within the models and theories?" I didn't know at that time, being it was early on in the master's program, so I just had to take these generic things I knew and try to connect them with me. *I think because of that it allowed me to look more deeply into each model to then find what are those pieces that connect with my values and beliefs as a person.* And then as I did that, I found so many connections, that's just what I continued to focus on in Advanced

[Equine]—was “How do I continue to identify these things, utilize these things, and build these things in my practice?”

P1 further echoes the sentiments of P3 by simply stating learning about themselves translated to their therapeutic performance.

P1: I don't think it's been problematic to my professional development or to others' professional development. I see it as solely helpful. *My time at Stable Place and the equine courses, Equine in general, has helped me learn more about myself. Which I think translates to all of my therapeutic endeavors*

Previous researchers (Aponte, 1992; Cheon and Murphy, 2007; Protinsky and Coward, 2001; Skovolt and Ronnestad, 1992) have expressed the need for personal awareness in counselor development. According to Lum (2002), “Therapists need to be able to observe oneself and to be able to reflect upon oneself in order to develop awareness. The increased awareness of therapists will benefit clients' exploration and the therapeutic processing of issues” (pp. 182-183). The synthesis between the personal and professional self is essential to therapist development (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992).

Lastly, my decision to conduct semi-structured interviews with six participants about their lived experience was a strength of the study that enhanced the results. The semi-structured interview process allowed me to have flexibility with each participant and offered the opportunity for follow-up questions to further add contextual meaning to the data. Utilizing a prepared schedule of questions was helpful in keeping my inquiry on target; however, it also allowed for the participants unique responses to be further explored, which significantly added to the results of the study. The guided questions allowed me to have meaningful conversations with the participants about their lived

experience. At the end of the interviews, participants discussed their enjoyment of having this conversation and being able to again reflect on their time while working with EARL.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation relates to the graduate students who participated in this study. They all chose to engage in all three levels of EAFT (I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses and employment at Stable Place). This can be considered a bias, as the classes were electives and the position with Stable Place was an agreement between the two parties. Some comments by the participants indicated that they entered the EAFT courses with the desire to learn about themselves, which is why they chose the class. For example, when asked I asked P1 what guided their decision to take the I-EAFT course, they responded this way:

P1: Uh, the, *the talk of the self-of-the-therapist*. So, so whenever I first got introduced to equine assisted learning was whenever I first started the graduate program. And I didn't really know who I was as a therapist. *The appeal of the class was to kinda help me find myself not only as a person, [but] as a therapist as well.*

P3 also took the equine class out of a desire to learn more about themselves.

P3: I had *originally thought that Equine would be a great opportunity for me to learn more about myself, as well as my skills, and then also to figure out more so where I'm failing in my line of thinking. Um, so that's how I originally started kind of in my head saying, "All right this is an opportunity where I'm gonna learn more about myself and about my skills and where I tend to think.* What lines I'm thinking along,

um, to help give me a better understanding of who I am as someone in the therapy field.”

As I went through the interviews, I began to notice a pattern emerge, in which a few of the participants illustrated the reason for taking the I-EAFT course was a desire to gain an understanding of their personal and professional selves. However, one might hope therapists-in-training are interested in learning about and understanding their personal and professional selves. This limitation is simultaneously seen as a strength.

Another limitation of this study I also previously considered a strength. The mixed population of graduated master’s-level participants and doctoral students is a strength, in that the implications of this research are more generalizable. However, I also see it as limitation of the population. At the time of the interviews, three out of six participants were not yet working in the family therapy field (looking for jobs) or had just recently started. Hence, this lack of experience in the field by some of the study participants may have limited the depth of their interpretations of EARL.

Lastly, researcher bias could have provided another limitation for this study. Given that I personally took the I-EAFT prior to the study participants, I had my own perspective of how EARL connected with my professional development. I managed to keep my biases in check by journaling my thoughts in a notebook as I transcribed the interviews. When conducting the interviews, I made certain to ask questions in a way that did not influence the responses. Furthermore, I encouraged the participants to be honest about their responses as we explored possible improvements for the I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses, as well as Stable Place. I also made certain to inquire if the participants felt the experience with EARL had been at all negative.

Implications of Study

The findings from this study can have an impact on the family therapy field and how graduate level students develop their therapeutic identity. I have hope that the lived experiences shared in this study will connect with other MFT students. It is my hope that the findings will assist in guiding the work of future researchers, educators, supervisors, and family therapy practitioners. As previously discussed, this study set out to explore how specific graduate students were understanding their experience with EARL and how they were relating this experience to their professional development. The derived findings from this study indicate that through experiential learning with a horse and self reflection, MFT students are learning about their personal selves and connecting this with who they are as family therapists.

Graduate Level MFT Students

The results of this study show that EARL had an impact on how graduate students are connecting the concepts and theories they are learning in their required educational courses to who they are as therapists and how this relates to working with clients. P5 demonstrates this by discussing some of the components of systemic thinking.

P5: Equine has been huge in helping me just think systemically, in terms of so much always going on out here [at the barn]. And so that's been really cool. That's been like a giant metaphor for everything that I'm learning in terms of there being so many subsystems and, there's no linear causality, there's no IP.

P6 also shared their belief about the therapeutic process and how they learned that through working with horses.

P6: I still think therapy is about using what your client gives you. And kind of just taking into consideration what you're bringing to the session as well, to kind of have that experiential portion of it. Because essentially, with the horses, you're taking what the horse is giving. You're taking what the client's giving; you're taking what you're giving and utilizing it in the session.

Field of Family Therapy

As previously stated, researchers have indicated a need for self-reflection in counselor development and education. Cheon and Murphy (2007) provided yet another reason why self-reflection in counselor development is important:

Without purposeful efforts to increase self-understanding by critically reflecting on one's values, assumptions, and biases on the context of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class and disability, therapists' self will be left unexamined and therapy could be a mirroring and reinforcing process of the dominant discourses in society.

The findings of this study indicate EARL is helpful for creating opportunities for self-reflection of the personal and professional self. For example, P4 discussed what skills they believe they now excel in with clients and what they learned about themselves for that to be possible:

P4: Skills, I guess *patience* is one of them. Confidence. I learned to stand up for myself. I learned that some pressure's okay. That if the rope is completely loose, the horse doesn't necessarily know where you want it to go. It can follow you and go where you lead it at a very loose place, but before that happens, there needs to be some sort of connection where the horse understands, "Oh you wanted me to

come with you”: So learning to be *clear in in my requests, my intention, my communication*.

Providing graduate students with an experiential opportunity to reflect on their personal and professional selves has the potential to create a population of therapists who are knowledgeable about their clinical process, guided by evidenced-based practices, and confident in their clinical abilities.

Suggestions for Future Research

To expand upon this research, future studies could focus on the reason students are choosing to engage in EARL. This would be helpful in understanding if the incoming mindset of the graduate student plays a role in how they make sense of their experience. Future studies could also focus on determining if there is a difference in how personal and professional development is being understood between master’s levels and doctoral level students. I would be curious to see if there is a difference in the professional development of graduate students who engage in EARL versus those who do not.

Furthermore, another future study could focus on the individual activities which are being facilitated in the both EAFT courses and what connections the graduate level MFT students are making with each activity. A study focused on the individual activities could provide more insight into what is being learned from each activity and what it is about the activities that is making an impact on the students. This information could assist with the growth of EARL as an innovative MFT teaching method for counselor development.

Concluding Thoughts

When I first decided to study the lived experiences of graduate students who completed both EAFT courses and gained employment of some manner with Stable Place, I wondered how the study participants were connecting EARL with their professional development, if at all. Upon conclusion of this study, my hopes were exceeded for the possibilities of this innovative, experiential type of learning. All of the participants discussed how EARL was the cornerstone of their professional development, which was facilitated through their personal growth. All participants expressed the need for this type of learning when developing as a therapist in graduate school.

Conducting this study has been enlightening and encouraging. It gave me the opportunity to develop a new perspective on what students believe is needed to develop professionally and the depth of self-reflection they are willing to endure to obtain that knowledge. Through this study, I was able to have focused conversations with Stable Place staff (past and present), that I might not have had otherwise. Not only have these discussions enhanced my understanding of how individuals are connecting EARL to their professional development, but they have allowed me to understand how graduate students in this MFT program could benefit from being offered more courses that specifically focus on personal growth and professional development.

I initially became interested in EAFT because of my love for AAT and my desire to one day incorporate a trained therapy dog into my practice. When I learned about the new course being offered, I was excited for the opportunity to learn about AAT from an insider's perspective, rather than simply reading about how the work is done. As I was preparing to answer the question "Who am I as a therapist? What theory do I bring into

the room when working with clients?” I took the I-EAFT course. At this time I feel it is important to add that by the time this question was asked of me, I was a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, had been working with clients for the past five years and only had an inkling of how I would answer these questions!

From the first day at the barn, I could sense how unique the class experience would be, and this feeling lasted throughout the course. When I completed the I-EAFT course, I gave a presentation about my therapeutic posture and what informs my practice. To date, this was the most clear, concise, cohesive, and confident presentation I had conducted. The feedback I received regarding the presentation echoed my beliefs and concurred with the self-assessment I facilitated. From that point forward, I wanted to know the takeaway from the other students in that course. Eight years later, I managed to collect the lived experiences of six individuals who developed their therapeutic posture through engaging in continuous self-reflection while working with EARL.

This study shows that MFT students have gained an understanding about who they are personally and how they operate professionally through EARL. The study also indicates how the current I-EAFT and A-EAFT courses meet the professional and educational requirements of MFTs, as set forth by the AAMFT. I hope that this study will have an impact on the process of how graduate students in MFT develop as professionals. I also hope this study will shed light on the desire of MFT graduate students to gain insight into their personal and professional selves.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Informed Consent



General Informed Consent Form NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled

A Phenomenological study exploring EARL: Equine Assisted Relational Learning

Who is doing this research study?

College: College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, Department of Marriage and Family Therapy

Principal Investigator: Natalie Rothman, M.S

Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair: Shelley Green, Ph.D.

Site Information: Stable Place, Inc, 5010 SW 73rd Ave, Davie, FL, 33324

Funding: Unfunded

What is this study about?

This research study is designed to test and create new ideas that other people can use. The purpose of this research study is to understand the lived experience of individuals who have completed the Introduction to Equine Assisted Family Therapy course and the Advanced Equine Assisted Family Therapy course and have been employed as a Staff Therapist or Student Intern at Stable Place, Inc. The study seeks to examine how these experiences have informed their professional development and understanding of themselves as therapists.

Why are you asking me to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this research study because you may have completed the introductory and advanced courses in Equine Assisted Family Therapy, and have been employed by Stable Place, Inc. The researcher is interested in your experience of learning about the work and conducting sessions at Stable Place, as well as your understanding of how those experiences have influenced your development as a therapist.

This study will include about 9 people. It is expected that 6 people will be from this location.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?

While you are taking part in this research study, you will be asked to participate in 1 semi-structured interview that should take no longer than 2 hours. This interview will be initially audio recorded and later digitally transcribed then analyzed for research purposes.

The interview will take place at Stable Place, Inc., or over the web-based platform, doxy.me. If meeting at Stable Place, Inc., the interview will take place at 5010 SW 73rd Ave, Davie, FL, 33324.

If meeting over the web-based platform, doxy.me, the PI will send a link through email to the potential participant after an agreed date and time for the video chat session has been established. This interview will be initially audio recorded and later digitally transcribed then analyzed for research purposes.

You will not have to return to the study site after the completion of the interview.

Research Study Procedures - as a participant, this is what you will be doing:

After the informed consent is completed and received by the PI, participants will engage in one semi structured interview which will take no longer than two hours. To be eligible for this study, participants must be 18 years old or older, have worked or currently work at Stable Place as an intern therapist or staff therapist, and have completed the Introduction to Equine Assisted Family Therapy and Advanced Equine Assisted Family Therapy courses at Nova Southeastern University.

The length of the one visit and interview will last no longer than 2 hours.

Are there possible risks and discomforts to me?

This research study involves minimal risk to you. To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?

You have the right to leave this research study at any time or refuse to be in it. If you decide to leave or you do not want to be in the study anymore, you will not get any penalty or lose any services you have a right to get. If you choose to stop being in the study before it is over, any information about you that was collected **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the end of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

What if there is new information learned during the study that may affect my decision to remain in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to whether you want to remain in this study, this information will be given to you by the investigator. You may be asked to sign a new Informed Consent Form, if the information is given to you after you have joined the study.

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

There are no direct benefits from being in this research study. I hope the information learned from this study will provide a foundation for developing innovative methods to enhance the supervision process for future marriage and family therapists.

Will I be paid or be given compensation for being in the study?

You will not be given any payments or compensation for being in this research study.

Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you for being in this research study.

How will you keep my information private?

Information we learn about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law and access will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. As soon as the informed consent is signed, the participant's identity is de-identified by a letter and a numerical code (P1). From this point forward, the participant will only be addressed by the pseudonym. To further enhance the de-identification process, the PI may alter the gender of the participants in the documented data. This data will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution, and any regulatory and granting agencies (if applicable). If we publish the results of the study in a scientific journal or book, we will not identify you.

Upon completion of the interview, the PI will transcribe the audio recorded interviews in the privacy of her home office while using headphones and a password protected computer. The PI will re-check the transcription for accuracy, and then store the digital audio-recordings on an encrypted flash drive (separate from the digital transcriptions). This encrypted flash drive will be stored in the PI's home office, in a locked filing cabinet. In the meantime, the digital transcriptions will be kept on an encrypted flash drive (separate from the audio-recorded interviews), which will be stored in the PI's home office, in a locked filing cabinet. All data will be kept for 36 months from the end of the study and destroyed after that time by deleting all digitally stored information and shredding any written documentation.

Will there be any Audio or Video Recording?

This research study involves audio recording. This recording will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board, and other representatives of this institution. The recording will be kept, stored, and destroyed as stated in the section above. Because what is in the recording could be used to find out that it is you, it is not possible to be sure that the recording will always be kept confidential. The researcher will try to keep anyone not working on the research from listening to the recording.

Whom can I contact if I have questions, concerns, comments, or complaints?

If you have questions now, feel free to ask us. If you have more questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact:

Natalie Rothman, M.S can be reached at 561-389-0682.

Research Participants Rights

For questions/concerns regarding your research rights, please contact:

Institutional Review Board

College of Arts, Humanities,
and Social Sciences | **NSU**
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY | Florida

Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369 / Toll Free: 1-866-499-0790
IRB@nova.edu

You may also visit the NSU IRB website at www.nova.edu/irb/information-for-research-participants for further information regarding your rights as a research participant.

All space below was intentionally left blank.

Research Consent & Authorization Signature Section

Voluntary Participation - You are not required to participate in this study. In the event you do participate, you may leave this research study at any time. If you leave this research study before it is completed, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

If you agree to participate in this research study, sign this section. You will be given a signed copy of this form to keep. You do not waive any of your legal rights by signing this form.

SIGN THIS FORM ONLY IF THE STATEMENTS LISTED BELOW ARE TRUE:

- You have read the above information.
- Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction about the research.

<u>Adult Signature Section</u>		
I have voluntarily decided to take part in this research study.		
_____	_____	_____
Printed Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date
_____	_____	_____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent and Authorization	Signature of Person Obtaining Consent & Authorization	Date

**Appendix B
IPA Data Set**

EARL	Master Themes	Transcript	Field Notes & Researcher Comments	AAMFT Sub-Domains
<p>EARL</p> <p>How interviewees connect their education in EAFT to relational concepts that illuminated further insights into their personal and professional selves. EARL is a new term coined to differentiate between Equine Assisted Learning and EAL informed by EAFT.</p>	<p>Relational Threads</p> <p>How interviewee is connecting to the experience of clinical work.</p>	<p>1. Relational Responses</p> <p><i>P3: EARL just allowed me to continuously take those tenants, those founding ideas and continuously apply them. One of the ways that I've found that I've done that is just remaining in a space of curiosity. Being curious with the client on their perspective and then looking at the situation they're describing. What's the context of that situation? What could be different in that situation? If I find what's different, how do I then emphasize or promote those things elsewhere? So, I think through my questioning from my stance in the room, that's how I'm really always bringing in the work from the barn in there.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Common Behaviors</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Executive</p> <p>Reason: behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.</p> <p>Curiosity is the behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.</p> <p>Linguistic: continuously take those tenants, those founding ideas and continuously apply them, remaining in a space of curiosity</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 describing how they have managed to continuously apply the founding tenants of EAFT through being curious while in the room or at the barn.</p>	<p>Executive Skills</p>

			<p>Conceptual: One of the ways that I've found that I've done that is just remaining in a space of curiosity. Being curious with the client on, their perspective and then looking at the situation they're describing. What's the context of that situation? What could be different in that situation? If I find what's different, how do I then emphasize or promote those things elsewhere?</p>	
		<p><i>P4: I learned to remain curious about the clients' process because the horses allow you to get into the clients' world in that moment. When they're struggling to lead the horse or they are terrified of approaching the horse or they're ambivalent or "resistant", whatever is happening in relation to the horse, tells me get curious about what's happening for the client. It invites me to be curious rather than assume they're failing, or they don't want to do it. It's got everything to do with the moment and what's happening between the two of them. So, instead of assuming things, I am curious about them.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Common Behaviors</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Executive</p> <p>Reason: behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.</p> <p>Curiosity is the behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process. Linguistic: remain curious, invites me to be curious, rather than assume</p> <p>Descriptive: P4 describing a behavior</p>	

			<p>when with the clients of remaining curious about the client's process instead of making assumptions</p> <p>Conceptual: whatever is happening in relation to the horse, tells me get curious about what's happening for the client</p>	
		<p><i>P3: I would say my clinical superpower would probably be empathic understanding or empathy. I am able to connect to clients very quickly and easily and be able to match them almost unconsciously and I think that has become a strength of mine because I am able to enter into a room and connect with so many diverse people and with so many different presenting problems even if I might not have ever experienced that specific situation myself. And I can do so in a way that allows my clients to open up in a vulnerable way that feels safe for them that they feel they can trust me, and we have this mutual respect or understanding. And so, I think being able to have that empathetic understanding or that empathy has allowed me to build these very strong therapeutic alliances.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Common Behaviors</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Executive</p> <p>Reason: the behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.</p> <p>Empathy is the behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.</p> <p>Linguistic: superpower would probably be empathic understanding or empathy, connect to clients very quickly and easily</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 explaining their clinical superpower is</p>	

			<p>empathy which allows them to build strong therapeutic alliances.</p> <p>Conceptual: I am able to connect to clients very quickly and easily and be able to match them almost unconsciously</p>	
		<p><i>P4: I think I would say empathy, or compassion, or consideration, some sort of mixture of those words because I find myself, thinking about “What is this gonna be like for you? If I were you, I would appreciate this, so how can I bring that without assuming that you need it?” I’m constantly negotiating those things with clients. I think it’s a useful superpower to have especially with clients where you can think about what it’s like for them to be sharing all of these things. I just feel like you can accomplish so much more collaborating.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Common Behaviors</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Executive</p> <p>Reason: behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process. Empathy is the highlighted behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process but also compassion, consideration, negotiation and collaboration.</p> <p>Linguistic: empathy, or compassion, or consideration, mixture of those words, constantly negotiating, collaborating</p> <p>Descriptive: P4 listing what skills they believe they excel in</p>	

			<p>when working with clients.</p> <p>: I think it's a useful superpower to have especially with clients where you can think about what it's like for them to be sharing all of these things.</p>	
		<p><i>P5: I'm comparing my work now to like when I first started, now, I'm patient. I'm transparent. I'm aware of giving my client honest feedback, of forming that connection with them. I'm a safe place. That's like the biggest thing, that I'm willing to be that person if a connection is what they need. I'm willing and I think able to be all those things for my client.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Common Behaviors</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Executive</p> <p>Reason: behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process Patient, transparent, feedback, safe place and connection is the highlighted behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.</p> <p>Linguistic: patient, transparent, aware of giving my client honest feedback, safe place.</p> <p>Descriptive: P5 sharing how they behave and what actions they take with their clients and their</p>	

			<p>confidence in doing so.</p> <p>Conceptual: I'm willing and I think able to be all those things for my client.</p>	
		<p><i>P4: Skills, I guess patience is one of them. Confidence. I learned to stand up for myself. I learned that some pressure's okay. That if the rope is completely loose, the horse doesn't necessarily know where you want it to go. It can follow you and go where you lead it at a very loose place but before that happens there needs to be some sort of connection where the horse understands "Oh you wanted me to come with you." So, learning to be clear in in my requests, my intention, my communication.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Common Behaviors</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Executive</p> <p>Reason: behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process. Patience and clear requests, intentions, and communications is how P4 engages in the behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.</p> <p>Linguistic: patience, learning to be clear in in my requests, my intention, my communication</p> <p>Descriptive: P4 discussing what they learned about how to interact with clients in order to work together was to be clear in their requests,</p>	

			<p>intentions, and communications.</p> <p>Conceptual: I learned that some pressure's okay. That if the rope is completely loose, the horse doesn't necessarily know where you want it to go. It can follow you and go where you lead it at a very loose place but before that happens there needs to be some sort of connection where the horse understands "Oh you wanted me to come with you."</p>	
		<p><i>PI: And to, to go back to the intentionality and being intentional with the clients and almost telling them like, "Hey I'm here. I'm here for you. This is your time right now", and then after that intention was set, just kind of rolling with that and using that as the intention throughout the session.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Common Behaviors</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Executive</p> <p>Reason: behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process Intentionality is the highlighted behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process but also compassion, consideration, negotiation and collaboration.</p>	

			<p>Linguistic: being intentional with the clients,</p> <p>Descriptive: P1 connecting intentionality with their behaviors and actions as a therapist.</p> <p>Conceptual: almost telling them like “Hey I’m here. I’m here for you. This is your time right now”</p>	
		<p><i>P6: In therapy, we have this thing where it’s you don’t plan. You just go in there, and you say, I’m just going to have a conversation, just go in and listen, and be present and be a calming presence to people. Because that’s what the horses are for me, and that’s what we are for our clients.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Common Behaviors</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Executive</p> <p>Reason: behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process Listen, present and calming are the highlighted behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.</p> <p>Linguistic: just go in and listen and be present and be a calming presence to people</p> <p>Descriptive: P6 identifying how they perceive therapy as a</p>	

			<p>conversation in which they are there are to listen, present and calming (as the horses did for them).</p> <p>Conceptual: It's just go in and listen, and be present. And be a calming presence to people. Because that's what the horses are for me, and that's what we are for our clients</p>
		<p>2. Be in the Moment, Be Present</p>	
		<p><i>P6: I would say my clinical superpower is being present and knowing how to be there with someone no matter what they're talking about. And listening to listen, and to hear them, and not to respond. I think that's a big thing that I learned, well, in professional life and in personal life, is I don't always have to say something back to you, not respond, and just listen.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Be in the Moment, Be Present</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Executive</p> <p>Reason: behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process. Listening without responding and being present is the highlighted behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process (could also be perceived as staying active listening, being</p>

		<p>present, showing empathy)</p> <p>Linguistic: being present and knowing how to be there</p> <p>Descriptive: P6 being specific about what behaviors and actions they use in clinical settings, being present and listening</p> <p>Conceptual: I think that's a big thing that I learned, well, in professional life and in personal life, is I don't always have to say something back to you, not respond, and just listen.</p>	
		<p><i>P3: I started to work on abandoning those confines of the models and what constricted me and allowed myself to utilize what was happening. I reminded myself to stay present rather than five steps ahead and I think that's where I'm at now is constantly reminding myself to stay present.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Be in the Moment, Be Present</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Executive</p> <p>Reason: the behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process. Being present is the highlighted behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.</p>

			<p>Linguistic: allowed myself to utilize what was happening, stay present</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 explaining what helped them to correct pacing in the therapy room was thinking about having a horse in the room which reminded them to stay present and utilize what was happening</p> <p>Conceptual: I started to work on abandoning those confines and what constricted me and allowed myself to utilize what was happening. I reminded myself to stay present rather than five steps ahead and I think that's where I'm at now is constantly reminding myself to stay present.</p>	
		<p><i>P1: With the mindfulness readings and the mindfulness talk that we had in the intro and in the advanced courses, it made me curious about different mindfulness techniques, different ways to be mindful. The talk of mindfulness in class helped to remind myself to be in this moment, with this client, with this child, and to give them the time that I</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Be in the Moment, Be Present</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Executive</p> <p>Reason: behaviors, actions, and interventions</p>	

		<p><i>intentionally set aside for them.</i></p>	<p>performed during the therapeutic process Being in the mindful of being present is the highlighted behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.</p> <p>Linguistic: mindfulness readings, mindfulness talk, curious about different mindfulness techniques</p> <p>Descriptive: P1 is describing how they connected with mindfulness in the Intro and Advanced EAFT courses and how they used mindfulness with their clients to maintain staying in the moment and intentionality.</p> <p>Conceptual: helped to remind myself to be in this moment, with this client, with this child, and to give them the time that I intentionally set aside for them.</p>	
		<p><i>P5: I'm a big believer in the therapist client relationship being the most important thing that you can ever do in there. And like that's what I'm very focused on. I'm</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p>	

		<p><i>never planning my next questions. I'm never thinking in the future. I'm very present. I got that solely from Equine.</i></p>	<p>Sub-Theme: Be in the Moment, Be Present</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Executive</p> <p>Reason: the behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process. Being present is the highlighted behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.</p> <p>Linguistic: the therapist client relationship being the most important thing, present. I got that solely from Equine</p> <p>Descriptive: P5 attributing how they remain present and in the moment with client rather than future thinking to Equine</p> <p>Conceptual: I'm never planning my next questions. I'm never thinking in the future. I'm very like present. I got that solely from Equine</p>	
		<p><i>P5: In terms of me just being able to provide therapy, of me learning how to be</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p>	

		<p><i>something other than just a good listener, I feel like it's everything that we've been talking about, learning how to connect with someone. I feel like that's my superpower. The thing that I'm good at is being there in the moment with them, willing to go wherever it's gonna go. It's like nothing else. I'm just in it. I'm just present.</i></p>	<p>Sub-Theme: Be in the Moment, Be Present</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Executive</p> <p>Reason: the behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.</p> <p>Being present is the highlighted behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.</p> <p>Linguistic: how to connect with someone. I feel like that's my superpower, I'm good at is being there in the moment with them</p> <p>Descriptive: P5 describing their superpower is connection with others, being present, being in the moment</p> <p>Conceptual: The thing that I'm good at is being there in the moment with them, willing to go wherever it's gonna go. It's like nothing else. I'm just in it. I'm just present.</p>	
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		<p><i>P6: I like the advanced class more. I feel like it was more about how to be a therapist, and how to work with clients. I think for the second class, it helped me to be more open, especially with clients. It helped me to really learn how to be in the moment, and how to be present, and not have all of these crazy thoughts about what question to ask, or, what activity am I going to do. But just to be there, and to appreciate, that specific moment.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Be in the Moment, Be Present</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Executive</p> <p>Reason: behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process Being present, being in the moment is the highlighted behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.</p> <p>Linguistic: how to be a therapist, how to work with clients, be in the moment, how to be present</p> <p>Descriptive: P6 describing how they learned to be open, in the moment and present with clients came from Advanced Equine class.</p> <p>Conceptual: And it helped me to really learn how to be in the moment, and how to be present, and not have all of these crazy thoughts about what question</p>	
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			<p>to ask, or, you know, what activity am I going to do? (P6 connecting that through A-EAFT they learned how to be in the moment, and how to be present with clients.)</p>	
		<p><i>P6: I want my clients to be comfortable. And maybe one day they come in, and they don't want to talk, but all we do is draw pictures or something. I want to be flexible enough to see my client where they're at, and being able to change my game plan, and switch things up, just being open, and just letting it be. Just being present, it comes back to that.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Be in the Moment, Be Present</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Executive</p> <p>Reason: behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process</p> <p>Being present is the highlighted behaviors, actions, and interventions performed during the therapeutic process.</p> <p>Linguistic: be comfortable, flexible, being present</p> <p>Descriptive: P6 stating how they behave and the mindset they want to maintain while working with clients and how it comes</p>	

			<p>back to being present.</p> <p>Conceptual: I want my clients to be comfortable. And maybe one day they come in, and they don't want to talk, but all we do is draw pictures or something. So I want to be flexible enough to see my client where they're at, and being able to change my game plan, and switch things up, just being open, and just letting it be.</p>	
		1. Professional Development		Professional Skills
		<p><i>P1: The talk of the self and the therapist. Whenever I first got introduced to equine assisted learning was whenever I first started the graduate program. I didn't really know who I was as a therapist. The appeal of the class was to help me find myself not only as a person, as a therapist as well.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Professional Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Appeal of the classes: EARL is being connected to professional development.</p> <p>Linguistic: talk of self and the therapist, appeal of the class</p>	

			<p>Descriptive: reason for registering for I-EAFT. because it is a reason for registering, this is a preconceived notion setting the context for P1's experience before engaging in EARL. Does one need to hold on to the belief that this class will teach you about yourself for that to occur? Is this a self-fulfilling prophecy?</p> <p>Conceptual: I didn't really know who I was as a therapist. The appeal of the class was to help me find myself not only as a person, as a therapist as well.</p>	
		<p><i>P2: Advanced was a little bit more intense because while I was okay talking about my personal, I didn't want to talk about if I had any struggles figuring out who I am as a therapist, which I was still figuring out. I remember the obstacle course, which we had to write down the struggles for the personal side, and the struggles for the professional, and having the horse go through the obstacle course. And then</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Professional Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Intro/Advanced: EARL is being connected to professional development.</p>	

		<p><i>after that, listening to my colleagues, it was not just me struggling between figuring out the balance between the two. It normalized my experience and that was great. Before that I thought I'm the only one that has no clue what I am doing, even though I guess I was having control over what I was doing. But I didn't have that confidence because I was still learning.</i></p>	<p>Linguistic: okay talking about personal, didn't want to talk about struggles figuring out who I am as a therapist, not just me struggling</p> <p>Descriptive: P2 discussing how the advanced course was more intense because it focused on self of therapist which they were struggling with figuring out but was normalized by classmates</p> <p>Conceptual: "It kinda like normalized my experience" P2 was validated by their classmates that they were not the only one feeling lost as a therapist. "I guess I was having control over what I was doing. But I didn't have that confidence because I was still learning." P2 looking back in retrospect and stating they were in control while identifying they did not have the confidence to trust in themselves as a therapist.</p>	
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		<p><i>P3: I decided to continue on with equine assisted relational learning because I had seen the benefit that I had gained and all the ways I learned to interact with clients and seeing myself utilize those in the room. I wanted to continue learning about who I am as a person, as a therapist, and then being able to see what I'm bringing to the horses and how I can then bring that to my clients.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Professional Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Intro/Advanced: EARL is being connected to professional development.</p> <p>Linguistic: benefit that I had gained, I wanted to continue learning</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 discussing their motivation to continue on with EAFT course was fueled by their desire to continue learning about themselves and how to be with clients.</p> <p>Conceptual: I wanted to continue learning about who I am as a person, as a therapist, and then being able to see what I'm bringing to the horses and how I can then bring that to my clients.</p>	
		<p><i>P1: In the intro course, for myself, it felt more... I was like maybe 60-70% client</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p>	

		<p><i>and 30% therapist. The purpose of the class wasn't that I was a client, but I felt that I was a client. I was finding my own answers to questions that were brought up in the Intro to Equine course. In the advanced course, I would say the percentages for me shift to like 40, where I felt like the client. And then 60 where I felt like the therapist.</i></p>	<p>Sub-Theme: Professional Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Intro/Advanced: EARL is being connected to professional development.</p> <p>Linguistic: The purpose of the class wasn't that I was a client, but I felt that I was a client.</p> <p>Descriptive: used to express how much P1 felt like the client versus the therapist while in I-EAFT and P1's perceived shift from personal focus to professional focus in the A-EAFT course. to further explain although they were not an actual client, they thought about the questions from class and how they would respond.</p> <p>Conceptual: intro course, for myself, it felt more... I was like maybe 60-70% client and 30% therapist, advanced course, I would say the percentages for</p>	
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		<p><i>P4: Well it took a long time for me to take the advanced course. I was going through a lot of things personally, this class really helped me work out all my personal issues and really helped me tease out who I am as a clinician. I used this class to think about all those things, take in all the readings and all the horses. I was there with a different purpose, and different intention. I thought, “I’d like to know more about this, there’s an opportunity to do more and what a perfect time to deal with all of this other stuff that we don’t really get an opportunity to do in the program.” There is no self-help course, there is no self-care course, there isn’t a lot that helps you to reflect or work out the things that you want to work out as a clinician, as a human being, as a woman, except for this type of experiential course.</i></p>	<p>me shift to like 40, where I felt like the client. And then 60 where I felt like the therapist</p> <p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Professional Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Self as Clinician: EARL is being connected to professional development.</p> <p>Linguistic: going through a lot of things personally, this class really helped me work out all my personal issues, tease out who I am as a clinician, different purpose, and different intention</p> <p>Descriptive: P4 sharing the reason they took AEAFT later and the intention behind the thought process for taking the course. P4 identified they had things going on personally that they wanted to work on personally as well as learn about</p>	
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			<p>themselves as a clinician.</p> <p>Conceptual: “I’d like to know more about this, there’s an opportunity to do more and what a perfect time to deal with all of this other stuff that we don’t really get an opportunity to do in the program.” There is no self-help course, there is no self-care course, there isn’t a lot that helps you to reflect or work out the things that you want to work out as a clinician, as a human being, as a woman, except for this type of experiential course.</p>	
		<p><i>P4: I realized that throughout the different activities in the advanced course, I would go into it thinking about things in a personal way, about how they were relating to my life, or helping me heal or helping me work things out within myself. I never would have thought about who I was in that way, had it not been for the experiences that happened with the horses. I was going into it [the activities] with those personal ideas and then I would think about myself as a clinician simultaneously.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Professional Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Self as Clinician: EARL is being connected to professional development.</p> <p>Linguistic: never would have thought about who I was in</p>	

		<p><i>That's what the experiential activities would bring up. I would reflect and then I'd read back on those reflections.</i></p>	<p>that way, personal ideas and then I would think about myself as a clinician simultaneously</p> <p>Descriptive: P4 describing their thought process in the AEAFt course and when they thought about their personal selves, the learned about their professional self.</p> <p>Conceptual: I never would have thought about who I was in that way, had it not been for the experiences that happened with the horses. I was going into it [the activities] with those personal ideas and then I would think about myself as a clinician simultaneously. That's what the experiential activities would bring up.</p>	
		<p><i>P3: I remember very early on one of the first things we did in advanced class is we drew a line on a paper and had one side being what are your values and beliefs as a person and then what are your values and beliefs as you think about what you know about family therapy. And what's important to you as a family therapist or</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Professional Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Self as Clinician: EARL is</p>	

		<p><i>within the models and theories. I didn't know at that time, being it was early on in the master's program, so I just had to take these generic things I knew and try to connect them with me. I think because of that it allowed me to look more deeply into each model to then find what are those pieces that connect with my values and beliefs as a person and then as I did that I found so many connections that's just what I continued to focus on in advance, was how do I continue to identify these things, utilize these things, and build these things in my practice.</i></p>	<p>being connected to professional development.</p> <p>Linguistic: your values and beliefs, important to you, to connect them with me, connect with my values and beliefs, how do I continue to identify</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 describing the process they took to develop their understanding of MFT models and how they connected with them and then applied to it to their practice.</p> <p>Conceptual: that I found so many connections that that's just what I continued to focus on in advance, was how do I continue to identify these things utilize these things and build these things in my practice.</p>	
		<p><i>P2: The egg activity was more like the support system. So, figuring out who was there for you, which I realized how important the support system is, my relationship with my parents, with my partner, and how they do help get you to this position. So every activity,</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Professional Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p>	

		<p><i>brought up a conversation about an important aspect of being a therapist. From the first class, the second class just builds up on us as professionals.</i></p>	<p>Reason: Self as Clinician: EARL is being connected to professional development.</p> <p>Linguistic: figuring out who was there for you, realized how important the support system is, they do help get you to this position</p> <p>Descriptive: P2 stating what they learned about their support system through the egg activity. P2 stating how overtime, the 2 classes build up your professional self.</p> <p>Conceptual: So every activity, brought up a conversation about an important aspect of being a therapist. From the first class, the second class just builds up on us as professionals.</p>	
		<p><i>P5: Equine helped me understand me as a whole person. I feel like it made me more of who I am and allowed me to be more of who I am and to grow in the areas that were lacking. And really strengthened the skills I was already strong in. I'm a better person than I was before I took the classes and I feel like it all kind of</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Professional Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Self as Clinician: EARL is</p>	

		<p><i>worked together to make me a more confident clinician.</i></p>	<p>being connected to professional development.</p> <p>Linguistic: helped me understand me, allowed me to be more of who I am, grow in the areas that were lacking, strengthened, the skills I was already strong in</p> <p>Descriptive: P5 is saying equine classes attributed to their personal and professional growth through learning about themselves, bettering themselves which is connected to them being a clinician.</p> <p>Conceptual: I'm a better person than I was before I took the classes and I feel like it all kind of worked together to make me a more confident clinician.</p>	
		<p><i>P3: So advanced for me was interesting because of when I took it. At the time I started advanced, I think I had had such a great foundation of who I was starting to believe I was as a therapist now in this field. I already started to think about and understand what my values and beliefs are, how do I apply them, how do I bring them into</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Professional Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Self as Clinician: EARL is</p>	

		<p><i>who I am and how I interact with others. I think having that self as a therapist piece early on going into advanced allowed me just to continue to build on that in a much more developed manner. I was able to really hone in and kind of ground myself in my model and my perspective very quickly. And so, then going through advanced I just continued to look at those things to reflect on those things and see where else am I noticing the isomorphic nature of who I am as a person versus who I am as a family therapist.</i></p>	<p>being connected to professional development.</p> <p>Linguistic: foundation of who I was starting to believe I was as a therapist, self as a therapist</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 listing their thought process to their foundational development as a therapist. P3 emphasizing the fast opportunity of personal professional growth Equine provided them. P3 emphasizing their ability to continue to assess themselves as a therapist.</p> <p>Conceptual: I already started to think about and understand what are my values and beliefs, how do I apply them, how do I bring them into who I am and how I interact with others, hone in and kind of ground myself in my model and my perspective very quickly, And so then going through advanced I just continued to look at</p>	
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			<p>those things to reflect on those things and see where else am I noticing the isomorphic nature of who I am as a person versus who I am as a family therapist</p>	
		<p><i>P3: I think my development as a therapist was defined by this experience. I was learning myself as a therapist and as I was learning the models, I was able to take what was isomorphic and highlight those in my practice. And so I think for me it allowed me very early on to find a model that fit and by doing so I was able to expanded learning on that model, do outside reading, do outside conferences and develop myself within that model because I already knew it fit. And I think for a lot of my colleagues that's where they get stuck and they struggle is they might not know how to take a model they like or a model they think might fit and really make it their own where I was able to do that from the beginning and as I developed as a therapist I was able to understand myself better as it related to the model that fits best with me and then, you know, develop from there as how do I now apply this model to my practice in how it fits.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Professional Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Self as Clinician: EARL is being connected to professional development.</p> <p>Linguistic: my development as a therapist was defined by this experience</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 describing how the equine work allowed them to dive deep into a model that was isomorphic to their and which allowed them to further expound upon these ideas. P3 compares their process to those of their classmates</p> <p>Conceptual: And I think for a lot of my</p>	

			<p>colleagues that's where they get stuck and they struggle is they might not know how to take a model they like or a model they think might fit and really make it their own where I was able to do that from the beginning and as I developed as a therapist I was able to understand myself better as it related to the model that fits best with me and then, you know, develop from there as how do I now apply this model to my practice in how it fits.</p>	
		<p>2. Personal Development</p>		
		<p><i>P6: The round pen... and I worked with Casper, and I always felt bonded with him, and I loved him. I had no problem getting him to follow me around. But then, Dr. Green said, "Okay, pretend it's a client who wants your phone number." Or who's, like, pushing your boundaries. And that's where I struggled with getting Casper to run around and get away from me. So, I realized that was something I could have an issue with, and I still have never had an issue with boundaries and clients, but I could see why that would be an issue</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Personal Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Personal Realizations: Earl is being connected with learning about the personal self.</p> <p>Linguistic: I struggled, I realized, but I could see why that would be an</p>	

		<p><i>for me. Just because I'm not super assertive, and I don't want to hurt anyone's feeling or anything like that. So that was an eye opener for something that could happen in the future. And applying how I worked with Casper, I was still gentle but firm, if that makes sense. Like, I put my foot down, I was like, "No, you're not going to be this close to me, I need my space." And I think keeping that in mind in the future when I work with clients is important to remember so I keep that therapeutic relationship while still being able to have that boundary.</i></p>	<p>issue for me. eye opener for something that could happen in the future</p> <p>Descriptive: P6 is learning something about themselves and exploring how to be different while working with the horse and translating over to a client</p> <p>Conceptual: And I think keeping that in mind in the future when I work with clients is important to remember so I keep that therapeutic relationship while still being able to have that boundary.</p>	
		<p><i>P5: I entered into the program being very cautious and during a class, the TA shared her observation and it was basically like "you are very goal-oriented". I didn't get that I was supposed to feel things. I took the feedback as like a slight criticism because I was like yeah, I am doing it! But I was not quite getting it. Then she framed it as, "that makes complete sense for you for where you are in your life. You have your number one priority. That's how you're surviving right now of having very clear, direct goals." I was willing to be analytical-but I wasn't</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Personal Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Personal Realizations: Earl is being connected with learning about the personal self.</p> <p>Linguistic: focused on my mental health, I was willing to be analytical-but I wasn't willing to be emotionally open.</p>	

		<p><i>willing to be emotionally open with other people.</i></p>	<p>Descriptive: P5 explaining they chose the course because of their previous connection with horses. P5 stating their focus was on their mental health and staying focused on their goals and how that was observed through their work with the horses which was initially taken negatively. P5 identified being emotionally closed off.</p> <p>Conceptual: I took the feedback as like a slight criticism because I was like yeah, I am doing it! But I was not quite getting it. Then she framed it as, “that makes complete sense for you for where you are in your life. You have your number one priority. That’s how you’re surviving right now of having very clear, direct goals.”</p>	
		<p><i>P5: I did not like having to trust other people to tell me where to go and where I was safe, to have all of my issues be so revealed. But obviously I was learning something, and there was a shift for me. I wasn’t willing to be</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Personal Development</p>	

		<p><i>vulnerable in front of other people and I was like, how am I gonna be a therapist if I can't even connect with a horse. And so that was a huge realization for me and a shift.</i></p>	<p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Personal Realizations: Earl is being connected with learning about the personal self.</p> <p>Linguistic: did not like having to trust other people, I was learning something, shift for me, I realized, how am I gonna be a therapist if I can't even connect</p> <p>Descriptive: P5 explaining in what way a shift occurred for them and the realization of being emotionally closed off and how they were connected to them as a therapist.</p> <p>Conceptual: It happened when I was just supposed to be close to the horse and in the moment, and maybe just feel something. I realized that I was completely closed off emotionally. Like I wasn't willing to go to emotional places. I wasn't willing to be vulnerable in front of other people and I was like, how</p>	
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			<p>am I gonna be a therapist if I can't even connect with a horse. And so that was a huge realization for me and a shift.</p>	
		<p><i>P6: No way was this experience problematic. I feel like it's helped me leaps and bounds. One thing that I will say that it helped me with is, merging my professional self and my personal self. And I know that that's something that I struggled with in BTI. But I almost can't be so professional if I'm around the horses, because I'm so giddy, I just love it. So it's helped me to realize that I don't have to be so proper and so stark. Like, I can have fun. That has helped me with this current job. It would help me in any job that I do, from here on out. Just to know that, you can let your personality come through, and it's not going to be a bad thing.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Personal Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Personal Realizations: Earl is being connected with learning about the personal.</p> <p>Linguistic: merging my professional self and my personal self, helped me to realize</p> <p>Descriptive: P6 explaining how they learned to be both/and as a therapist with the horses but struggled with this in a traditional therapy setting</p> <p>Conceptual: it's helped me to realize that I don't have to be so proper and so stark. Like, I can have fun. That has helped me with this</p>	

			<p>current job. It would help me in any job that I do, from here on out. Just to know that, you can let your personality come through, and it's not going to be a bad thing.</p>	
		<p><i>P2: The tarp activity, when it was my turn, the other group [of students] showed up, so now I had everybody staring at me. I ended up just walking by everybody, and thinking hey, it's just me and the horse. Then we ended up taking a step on the tarp, which I felt very successful. While he didn't step into the hole, he at least took one step towards it, which meant a lot to me. We called [the tarp] public speaking and something that has to do with anxiety and people watching you. And it so happened that with the whole group was watching me. But I was able to face another fear and be able to not take the whole step into the public speaking so to say, but we were able to take a step towards it, one or two steps towards it. That was enough for me. It felt amazing because we did it together. It took me to be determined and not focus on the people from the outside. It got me to being connected with the horse, to be present in the moment and be with him. And just</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Personal Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Personal Realizations: Earl is being connected with learning about the personal self and working to be different.</p> <p>Linguistic: able to face another fear, to take a step towards it.</p> <p>Descriptive: P2 is describing the activity and how taking two steps towards their fear of public speaking and performing in front of others was successful for them and how they managed that success by being present and in the</p>	

		<p><i>focus and just be there so we can do it together.</i></p>	<p>moment with the horse.</p> <p>Conceptual: I ended up just walking by everybody, and thinking hey, it's just me and the horse. It took me to be determined and not focus on the people from the outside.</p>	
		<p><i>P5: Another moment that was really meaningful for me was when I connected with Casper. It was one of those "just be with the horse activities" and I was very focused on that, just like being in the moment and not getting distracted with the horsey stuff. That was part of the release, I wasn't trying to do anything other than something different. Trying to learn something different by being with the animal. I got really, really close and put my ear right there to try to listen to the breathing and then it was one of those things that once we connected, we moved together. It was like when I started to walk, he would follow me instead of me pulling on the lead rope. I was kind of experimenting with the horses and trying out different things to make a connection when I realized I needed to shift how I approached the horse which I related to how I approached clients.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Personal Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Personal Realizations: Earl is being connected with learning about the personal self and working to be different.</p> <p>Linguistic: being in the moment, not getting distracted, once we connected, we moved together</p> <p>Descriptive: P5 describing an experience in which she was practicing being in the moment and realizing how that would work in connecting with clients.</p>	

			<p>Conceptual: I realized I needed to shift how I approached the horse which I related to how I approached clients.</p>	
		<p><i>P6: The thing that started off for me as uncomfortable is also something that pushed me forward. I don't think I realized that until after both of these classes. I never want to be uncomfortable, so I've always shied away from things that make me nervous, or where I could be embarrassed, or people could judge me. But then, I guess, I never really accepted that part of myself until these classes. And now obviously I still don't like to do it, but I still push myself more. Currently, I'm in an uncomfortable situation, but I'm still here and thriving. So, I think it opened my eyes to just being accepting of that and acknowledging that's just a part of my personality. But still challenging myself to my comfort level in my uncomfortableness, if that makes sense.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Personal Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Personal Realizations: Earl is being connected with learning about the personal self and working to be different.</p> <p>Linguistic: started off for me as uncomfortable is also something that pushed me forward, never want to be uncomfortable, shied away from things that make me nervous</p> <p>Descriptive: P6 describing a way they have noticed a change in how they approach situations that make them uncomfortable, nervous or embarrassed</p>	

			<p>Conceptual: Currently, I'm in an uncomfortable situation, but I'm still here and thriving. So, I think it opened my eyes to just being accepting of that and acknowledging that's just a part of my personality. But still challenging myself to my comfort level in my uncomfortableness, if that makes sense. (P6 emphasizing how this is still present in their life.)</p>	
		<p><i>P4: I had to learn a new language, because my culture, and my upbringing, and my own expectations of myself taught me to be one way and it worked. This hadn't failed me yet. It pushed me to be the best version of myself. I don't want to be mediocre within myself, so this was a great model to live by.</i></p> <p><i>Experiencing success that looks different was just like "Oh, this is possible?" The horses really do that. We can talk about it till we're blue in the face, but it's one when we're doing it, when we're struggling, when we did it! All those things stick to you physically and then stay with you linger, they mean something else down the line, that stuff you can't teach. It was learning that</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Personal Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Personal Realizations: Earl is being connected with learning about the personal self and working to be different.</p> <p>Linguistic: learn a new language, experiencing success that looks different</p> <p>Descriptive: P4 discussing how they</p>	

		<p><i>there were other possibilities of accomplishing things, of getting through life, of going through clinical work, of helping people, of being present. I had no idea this was possible.</i></p>	<p>used to think they needed to be to reach success and how experiential activities showed them another way</p> <p>Conceptual: All those things stick to you physically and then stay with you linger, they mean something else down the line, that stuff you can't teach. It was learning that there were other possibilities of accomplishing things, of getting through life, of going through clinical work, of helping people, of being present.</p>	
		<p><i>P4: Advanced class was the first time in my life that I could give it my best and have that be enough. Ever. I've always been an overachiever my entire life. My own expectations of myself have always been that. And then this course just like forced me to be okay with not finishing [activities]. It forced me to be okay with things not going as planned. We were paying attention to what's important versus the task, which I hadn't been paying</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Personal Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Personal Realizations: Earl is being connected with learning about the personal self and working to be different.</p>	

		<p><i>attention to in my life at all because I was focused on needing to finish school. This changed my goal as a therapist. Clients come in with “I want to feel better, I want to do better, I want this to be different.” And so, I’m so much more interested in “OK, between this point and that point, like what can we do here in this in between place?” I’m much more interested in process.</i></p>	<p>Linguistic: first time in my life that I could give it my best and have that be enough, always been an overachiever, forced me to be okay with not finishing, forced me to be okay with things not going as planned</p> <p>Descriptive: P4 describing how the course changed her perspective on how they work with client in working between the start and the end goal. P4 identified she wasn’t doing this in her own life so having this realization changed her therapy goals.</p> <p>Conceptual: We were paying attention to what’s important versus the task, which I hadn’t been paying attention to in my life at all because I was focused on needing to finish school. This changed my goal as a therapist.</p>	
		<p><i>P3: The first and main thing is I became more aware of what my strengths were in the room. That is also two-fold being that I was also aware of where my detriments were or where</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Personal Development</p>	

		<p>my areas in improvement were. <i>I think having that space to constantly self-reflect and grow and learn about who I am and how I practice really translated into how I was in the room. Being that I was constantly reflecting on and thinking about what I am doing, how am I doing it, what can I do better, what could I do differently, what's working, what's not working. And I think that all came from the equine classes and the experience that I've had with the equine assisted relational learning. I think also being able to recognize utilization and the importance of utilizing what the clients bring, remaining present and mindful of the space you're in, being able to be flexible and hold, the idea that there is no expert in this particular situation. That there is no right or wrong answer. Not having those expectations was really something that I was able to take from Equine and bring into my practice in the room.</i></p>	<p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Personal Realizations: Earl is being connected with learning about the personal self and working to be different.</p> <p>Linguistic: became more aware of what my strengths, also aware of where my detriments were, space to constantly self-reflect</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 explaining how their EARL training crosses over into their daily practice and what made the difference was the space to self-reflect.</p> <p>Conceptual: I think also being able to recognize utilization and the importance of utilizing what the clients bring, remaining present and mindful of the space you're in, being able to be flexible and hold, the idea that there is no expert in this particular situation.</p>	
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			<p>That there is no right or wrong answer. Not having those expectations was really something that I was able to take from Equine and bring into my practice in the room.</p>	
		<p><i>P3: I think the first one for me would probably be flexibility. I have always been the type that if I set expectations for myself and I don't meet those I am like very depressed and down on myself. I have a very low self-esteem when I don't match those expectations and I really noticed a change in myself in my ability to be flexible and not maintain expectations. If I do have expectations, they are malleable. I can move them or shape them differently so it's not a detriment to my wellbeing overall. So, I think that would probably be like one of the main things that I've taken from the work and applied to my day to day. Another thing that I think I've done is that piece about self-reflecting. I notice I'm constantly processing and constantly reflecting on the work I do or how I interact with people. That's something that at times used to get me down a rabbit hole and I wouldn't stop thinking about it and I</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Personal Development</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Personal Realizations: Earl is being connected with learning about the personal self and working to be different.</p> <p>Linguistic: a change in myself in my ability to be flexible and not maintain expectations, I notice I'm constantly processing and constantly reflecting on the work I do or how I interact with people</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 explaining how equine crosses over into their day to day life, more flexible,</p>	

		<p><i>would just spiral. But I've noticed now I can do that in a way where I'm thinking about it or reflecting but then it's not something that's impacting me negatively. I can stop it at some point and say, "Okay this is what I learned, and this is what I could do differently." I'm not going on and on and on and just staying in that space. I think that those would be two of the main things. Kind of just that appreciation for an acceptance of myself and who I am as well as the ability to understand how to be flexible and how to adapt to situations while being mindful and present are definitely things that I've taken from my work as an equine therapist into bringing to my day to day.</i></p>	<p>constant self-reflection and how it has shifted from over analyzation to self-acceptance, maintaining mindfulness and being present</p> <p>Conceptual: Kind of just that appreciation for an acceptance of myself and who I am as well as the ability to understand how to be flexible and how to adapt to situations while being mindful and present are definitely things that I've taken from my work as an equine therapist into bringing to my day to day.</p>	
		<p>3. Beliefs about Professional Identity Development</p>		
		<p><i>P1: I put a lot of emphasis on the equine work in my development as a therapist. Having me recognize different thoughts and feelings, and emotions that I could have in not only my professional life, but in my personal life. Though it was an elective, it's something that other courses could not offer in my mind. The skill of feel it, think it, what are you thinking about right now.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: attitudes of the therapist related to providing MFT</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Something other courses could not offer. Learning about the personal</p>	

			<p>self is connected to the professional self.</p> <p>Linguistic: something that other courses could not offer in my mind</p> <p>Descriptive: P1 is explaining equine work had themselves reflect on their personal and professional life like no other course offered.</p> <p>Conceptual: I put a lot of emphasis on the equine work in my development as a therapist. Having me recognize different thoughts and feelings, and emotions that I could have in not only my professional life, but in my personal life.</p>	
		<p><i>P2: I think it should be a required class honestly, at least the intro. I think it's an important class because there's not another class that you self-reflect in. And view into your soul and who you are, and like building the little pieces of puzzle that at the end of the two year program, end up being who I am because of all of the equine classes I took, and all the experiences that just molded together. There's not a class that gives me this experiential experience.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: attitudes of the therapist related to providing MFT</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Something other courses could not offer. Learning about the personal self is connected to the professional self.</p>	

			<p>Linguistic: And view into your soul and who you are</p> <p>Descriptive: P2 sharing why they think at least IEAFT should be a required course and how they feel more confident in who they are as therapist in comparison to cohort members who did not take the courses.</p> <p>Conceptual: and like building the little pieces of puzzle that at the end of the two-year program end up being who I am because of all of the equine classes I took, and all the experiences that like just molded together.</p>	
		<p><i>P5: Every other class is just you learning information. I mean it's all mental health related but it's not personal. I don't know how people learn how to be a therapist without the equine classes. I don't know how they know anything about themselves. Or like when it comes to their thinking about doing clinical portfolio without doing, how do they know? Like that's such a crazy question to ask someone that hasn't taken these classes of like who are you as a person and what model fits for you? Nothing is as personal or</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: attitudes of the therapist related to providing MFT</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Something other courses could not offer. Learning about the personal self is connected to the professional self. Linguistic: I don't know how they</p>	

		<p><i>has given you enough time to be as self-reflective. With the horses, there's an honesty, you can't really lie to yourself for very long.</i></p>	<p>know anything about themselves, crazy question to ask, who are you as a person and what model fits for you, Nothing is as personal</p> <p>Descriptive: P5 verbalizing Equine is the only classes that give you the opportunity to learn about self-reflect honestly.</p> <p>Conceptual: I don't know how people learn how to be a therapist without the equine classes.</p>	
		<p><i>P6: Well, we had to journal for every class. And I'm like, ugh, but like, Equine was the only class where I was, out there, and actually experiencing things. I wasn't just sitting there and thinking about, okay these are my values, this is what I'm biased about. Instead, it was like, a live action thing, which was really cool. And I could not have gotten that experience in any other class. I think you need to learn about yourself as a person, first, before you learn about yourself as a therapist. And I think Equine helped me with that a lot.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: attitudes of the therapist related to providing MFT</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Something other courses could not offer. Learning about the personal self is connected to the professional self.</p> <p>Linguistic: only class, actually experiencing things, a live action thing.</p> <p>Descriptive: P6 explaining the EAFT classes are where</p>	

			<p>they experienced concepts rather than thought about them and how they did not get this type of experience in any other class.</p> <p>Conceptual: I think you need to learn about yourself as a person, first, before you learn about yourself as a therapist. And I think Equine helped me with that a lot.</p>	
		<p><i>P3: I think this experience is something everyone should have to do and the sooner the better. I just learned so much about who I am first, which allowed me to then take these models as I learned them to figure out how it fits for me. I think from the way I was able to go through this experience, the only thing it could ever do was benefit me. Because I was in a place where it was my first time moving away from home and finally out on my own in a sense and I'm learning about who I am. And then I learned who I was and now I'm learning about my profession and what fits for me. And so, I don't think there ever could be an instance when this wouldn't be helpful for someone or this couldn't be beneficial.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: attitudes of the therapist related to providing MFT</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills Reason:</p> <p>Learning about the personal self is connected to the professional self. Linguistic: just learned so much about who I am first, only thing it could ever do was benefit me</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 explaining why they believe everyone should take the equine courses and how it has helped</p>	

			<p>them figure out their personal and professional identity</p> <p>Conceptual: learned so much about who I am first, which allowed me to then take these models as I learned them to figure out how it fits for me</p>	
		<p><i>P1: I don't think it's been problematic to my professional development or to others professional development. I see it as solely helpful. My time at Stable Place and the equine courses, Equine in general, has helped me learn more about myself. Which I think translates to all of my therapeutic endeavors.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: attitudes of the therapist related to providing MFT</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Learning about the personal self is connected to the professional self.</p> <p>Linguistic: I don't think it's been problematic, solely helpful</p> <p>Descriptive: P1 stating EARL has been helpful in learning about personal self which they connect with their professional self.</p> <p>Conceptual: Equine in general, has helped me learn more about myself.</p>	

			Which I think translates to all of my therapeutic endeavors.	
		<i>P5: So me being more whole, I think put me in a place where I could have a therapeutic conversation with someone and not be in my own head, in terms of like doubting myself or questioning myself. I feel like I saw a lot of those types of doubts in my peers. Stable Place, having this experience, it made me more confident, it made me more relaxed. It really helped me grow as an individual and a clinician.</i>	<p>Master Theme: Relational</p> <p>Sub-Theme: attitudes of the therapist related to providing MFT</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Professional Skills</p> <p>Reason: Learning about the personal self is connected to the professional self.</p> <p>Linguistic: not be in my own head, saw a lot of those types of doubts in my peers</p> <p>Descriptive: P5 stating how they saw something different in themselves versus their peers and they are attributing that to Equine.</p> <p>Conceptual: It really helped me grow as an individual and a clinician.</p>	
	Learning through Reflection	1. Conceptualization		Conceptual Skills
	How interviewee is connecting	<i>P1: It's not that cookie cutter and cut and dry, every client's different. So, with learning the theories of Equine, and then introducing it to clients, I found that it</i>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Conceptualization</p>	

	<p>learned MFT skills to clinical application.</p>	<p><i>was more helpful to be flexible.</i></p>	<p>Sub-Domain: Conceptual Skills</p> <p>Reason: Demonstrating MFT concepts (every client is different) and connect with an intentional behavior (being flexible), due to understanding a therapist is an agent of change.</p> <p>Linguistic: P1 “cookie cutter” wants researcher to know Equine therapy is not straight forward and it is helpful to be flexible when working with clients.</p> <p>Descriptive: P1 is connecting what they have learned in equine courses to how they need to be with their clients. P1 learned it was more helpful to be flexible for their clients benefit</p> <p>Conceptual: It’s not that cookie cutter and cut and dry, every client’s different</p>	
		<p><i>P2: I realized how much harder it is to be on the therapist side, because you know that only one question can open up so many emotions. It’s amazing that</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Conceptualization</p>	

		<p><i>the program is where you need to take the first two classes, and you are experiencing what your client might experience. That's like an important key. Because if you don't know, then I'm pretty sure you'll end up doing therapy in a totally different way. But you were also a client, and now you know to look at the verbal, non-verbal communications, to note hey he is really in the moment right now, like don't ask the question, something is going on up there.</i></p>	<p>Sub-Domain: Conceptual Skills</p> <p>Reason: Demonstrating MFT concepts (knowing only one question can open up so many emotions) and connect with an intentional behavior (paying attention to verbal and no verbal communication), due to understanding a therapist is an agent of change.</p> <p>Linguistic: realized how much harder it is to be on the therapist side, one question can open up so many emotions, look at the verbal, non-verbal communications</p> <p>Descriptive: P2 is explaining why they believe it is important to have experienced what they believe a client experience. P2 is indicating what a therapist should be paying attention to in a session and when to ask questions or not ask questions because the client is processing.</p> <p>Conceptual: But you were also a client,</p>	
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			<p>and now you know to look at the verbal, non-verbal communications, to note hey he is really in the moment right now, like don't ask the question, something is going on up there.</p>	
		<p><i>P3: I think first, and foremost equine assisted relational learning allowed me to see isomorphism and the importance of that. I can only bring myself into the room. Just like I can only bring myself out to the barn and as we always say to clients, the horse reflects that to us. So, who I am out at the barn is who I'm gonna be in the room. And so being able to see and understand myself isomorphic to my model allowed me to then be able to better my understanding of theory, to better understand my practice. Um, so I think that would probably be the main thing. Is that isomorphic piece, being able to see what connects with you with what you're doing and how that is communicated.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Conceptualization</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Conceptual Skills</p> <p>Reason: Demonstrating MFT concepts (isomorphism) and connect with an intentional behavior (expound upon theoretical knowledge and development insight into clinical practice), due to understanding a therapist is an agent of change.</p> <p>Linguistic: I can only bring myself into the room</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 explaining they learned they can only be themselves so they needed to learn how they and</p>	

		<p>the model can connect which deepened their understanding of the model</p> <p>Conceptual: So who I am out at the barn is who I'm gonna be in the room. Um, so I think that would probably be the main thing. Is that isomorphic piece, being able to see what connects with you with what you're doing and how that is communicated.</p>	
		<p><i>P5: In practicum this term, my client was dealing with a lot of serious issues and if I didn't have any experience with them, I would have thought they would have been scary to deal with. But through Equine, I've learned how valuable just having someone willing to be with you and sit with you and not rush you is. I think that's a gift, one for me to have learned.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Conceptualization</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Conceptual Skills</p> <p>Reason: Demonstrating MFT concepts (leading from one step behind) and connect with an intentional behavior (allowing client to sit in the moment and not be rushed through), due to understanding a therapist is an agent of change.</p> <p>Linguistic: I've learned how</p>

			<p>valuable, sit with you and not rush you, a, gift</p> <p>Descriptive: P5 verbalizing their understanding of how powerful it is to allow the client to lead the session as well as not pushing.</p> <p>Conceptual: I've learned how valuable just having someone willing to be with you and sit with you and not rush you is.</p>	
		<p><i>P6: I still think therapy is about using what your client gives you. And kind of just taking into consideration what you're bringing to the session as well, to kind of have that experiential portion of it. Because essentially, with the horses, you're taking what the horse is giving. You're taking what the client's giving; you're taking what you're giving and utilizing it in the session.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Conceptualization</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Conceptual Skills</p> <p>Reason: Demonstrating MFT concepts (idea of using what your client gives you and considering therapist impact) and connect with an intentional behavior (utilizing it), due to understanding a therapist is an agent of change.</p> <p>Linguistic: taking into consideration what you're bringing</p>	

		<p>to the session you're taking, utilizing it,</p> <p>Descriptive: P6 describing how they think the therapist is part of the therapeutic context</p> <p>Conceptual: I still think it's about using what your client gives you. And kind of just taking into consideration what you're bringing to the session as well</p>	
		<p>2. Incorporating Theory</p>	
		<p><i>P3: Stable Place emphasizes a very non-judgmental, non-expert, stance, highlighting those solution focused tenants of let's look for strengths, resources, how can we apply these things, you know, for our clients. But I see that being part of what we do even with each other, is let me highlight my co-therapist's strengths, let me highlight my co-therapist's resources and let's collaborate and build and grow together. I see that with the equine specialists as well, but they are coming from a more expert stance, I think they tend to bring an expert perspective at times to the greater culture. So, I think when you bring us all together we end up being very collaborative.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Incorporating Theory</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Conceptual Skills</p> <p>Reason: Demonstrate knowledge and familiarity with family therapy models and their concepts, system theories and thinking- systems theories</p> <p>Linguistic: non-judgmental, non-expert, stance, highlighting those</p>

		<p>solution focused tenants</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 describing the isomorphism in how EAFT therapists practice therapy to how they interact</p> <p>Conceptual: But I see that being part of what we do even, you know, with each other</p>	
		<p><i>P3: I think the work that I have been lucky enough to do out at the barn has really influenced how I will practice for the rest of my life or the rest of my career. I've been able to understand different populations of people, different presenting problems in such a unique way that has allowed me to constantly be open and flexible with my practice. And I think that's something that I'll always be able to take with me even if I don't have the means to do this work. I'm always going to be able to take those founding principles of our work out at the barn and constantly apply those. The aspect of there is no right or wrong. Because there isn't. You know, I'm- I'm operating from a non-expert stance whether I'm out at the barn or in the room. So being able to practice those things the way we are now I think has</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Incorporating Theory</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Conceptual Skills</p> <p>Reason: demonstrate knowledge and familiarity with family therapy models and their concepts, system theories and thinking- system theories</p> <p>Linguistic: open and flexible with my practice, going to be able to take those founding principles of our work out at the barn and constantly apply those</p>

		<p><i>really ingrained them into who I am in the room.</i></p>	<p>Descriptive: P3 stating the work they do at the barn has shaped how they practice therapy and will continue to inform it. P3 defining what they believe are the basis of EAFT.</p> <p>Conceptual: I'm always going to be able to take those founding principles of our work out at the barn and constantly apply those. The aspect of there is no right or wrong. Because there isn't. You know, I'm- I'm operating from a non-expert stance whether I'm out at the barn or in the room.</p>	
		<p><i>P4: The biggest lesson that I learned was that it is more about process than about content. I learned that finishing the activity didn't matter as much as what was happening throughout it. I learned that I didn't have to complete the activity to make it powerful.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Incorporating Theory</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Conceptual Skills Reason: demonstrate knowledge and familiarity with family therapy models and their concepts, system theories and</p>	

			<p>thinking- system theories</p> <p>Linguistic: more about process than about content</p> <p>Descriptive: P4 stating through Equine they learned the process of something gives more information than the content.</p> <p>Conceptual: I learned that finishing the activity didn't matter as much as what was happening throughout it.</p>	
		<p><i>P5: Equine has been huge in helping me just think systemically. In terms of so much always going on out here [at the barn] and so that's been really cool. That's been like a giant metaphor for everything that I'm learning in terms of there being so many subsystems and, there's no linear causality, there's no IP.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Incorporating Theory</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Conceptual Skills</p> <p>Reason: Demonstrate knowledge and familiarity with family therapy models and their concepts, system theories and thinking- system theories</p> <p>Linguistic: Equine has been huge in</p>	

			<p>helping me just think systemically</p> <p>Descriptive: P5 stating Equine has served as a large metaphor of the concepts they were learning in school</p> <p>Conceptual: That's been like a giant metaphor for everything that I'm learning</p>	
		<p><i>P6: My first non-role play experience as therapist would be when I helped out with a Nova training, actually. The facilitators started asking if I had any questions and what I noticed. That was the first day that I really got into the mindset of an equine therapist. It was one of the professional development sessions. So, I saw how using horses can be applied to something much deeper, as in the therapy. Or something a little bit more surface level, like professional development. But still interactional, and still having that systemic view.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Incorporating Theory</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Conceptual Skills</p> <p>Reason: demonstrate knowledge and familiarity with family therapy models and their concepts, system theories and thinking- system theories</p> <p>Linguistic: still interactional, and still having that systemic view.</p> <p>Descriptive: P6 describing how they saw the systems thinking in a professional</p>	

			development training	
			Conceptual: So, I saw how using horses can be applied to something much deeper, as in the therapy. Or something a little bit more surface level, like professional development. But still interactional, and still having that systemic view.	
		1. Data Interpretation		Perceptual Skills
		<i>P1: After experiencing the theories with clients, it wasn't as cut and dry. You really had to meet the client where they were. The client could be going through whatever. The first time a client comes in, they might not be open to talking about obstacles they have, or the different things that are difficult for them, much less with someone who they've just met. Even if it's the therapist client relationship. Some things for some people are difficult to talk about with anybody. I myself learned that not everybody is ready to talk about whatever activity we have planned that day. And whatever they bring in that day, is what they bring in that day.</i>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Data Interpretation</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Perceptual Skills Reason: Example of interpretation of data through a conceptual lens</p> <p>Linguistic: it wasn't as cut and dry, not everybody is ready to talk, meet the client where they were</p> <p>Descriptive: P1 is illustrating the importance of conceptualizing where the client is coming from to better understand</p>	

		<p>how to work with them. P1 is identifying the importance of not pushing the client but rather leading from 1 step behind which is an MFT concept tied in theory.</p> <p>Conceptual: The client could be going through whatever. The first time a client comes in, they might not be open to talking</p>	
		<p><i>P3: I think each of the activities out at the barn are so impactful because you put yourself in the client's shoes. So even if you don't have an "ah-ha moment" yourself, I think what's helpful about the activities in the classes is just that you're able to start relating what's going on for you at the barn to how your client might experience it. I think being able to walk in say a client's shoes allows you to get a better perspective and understanding of what you're asking your clients to do. Whether it's out at the barn or in the room. At the very least it allows me to understand, what my clients experience could be like and then how should I as a therapist, be mindful of those things and maybe tailor what I'm asking my clients to do in a way that</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Data Interpretation</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Perceptual Skills</p> <p>Reason: Example of interpretation of data through a conceptual lens</p> <p>Linguistic: impactful because you put yourself in the client's shoes, how your client might experience it, walk in say a client's shoes</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 discussing how having the experience of the</p>

		<p><i>allows them to feel safe while being vulnerable just as I was having to do in the classes.</i></p>	<p>activities which are also done with clients, helps them interpret observations from a conceptual lens</p> <p>Conceptual: At the very least it allows me to understand, what my clients experience could be like and then how should I as a therapist, be mindful of those things and maybe tailor what I'm asking my clients to do in a way that allows them to feel safe while being vulnerable just as I was having to do in the classes.</p>	
		<p><i>P4: It's the in between stuff that is rich. It's the stuff the client doesn't say that they go home thinking about that is really transformative. If we didn't complete the activity and what does that feel like for somebody, "How does this translate?" So it was about translating the process of the activities, and having the client take away whatever they wanted rather than what I thought they should take.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Data Interpretation</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Perceptual Skills Reason: Example of interpretation of data through a conceptual lens</p> <p>Linguistic: It's the in between stuff that is rich, It's the stuff the client doesn't say</p> <p>Descriptive: P4 discussing what they focus on when</p>	

		<p>conceptualizing their clients</p> <p>Conceptual: If we didn't complete the activity and what does that feel like for somebody, "How does this translate?"</p>	
		<p><i>P4: I let the client know "I'm not here to make anything be different for you." Everyone around them was pushing them to get better and to feel better, and everyone wants them to stop being depressed and crying. What would that mean for their friends who died? What would that mean for their memory? What would it mean for the client to move on so quickly? To go to prom, to graduate high school, to move on and to leave all this behind? I'm in no rush to make the client move away from that.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Data Interpretation</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Perceptual Skills</p> <p>Reason: Example of interpretation of data through a conceptual lens</p> <p>Linguistic: I'm not here to make anything be different for you, no rush to make the client move, permission really brought down all their defenses</p> <p>Descriptive: P4 describing their conceptualization on a case and connects that back to the idea there is no rush to make anything happen, a lesson from Stable Place</p> <p>Conceptual: What would that mean for their friends who</p>

			<p>died? What would that mean for their memory? What would it mean for the client to move on so quickly? To go to prom, to graduate high school, to move on and to leave all this behind? I'm in no rush to make the client move away from that.</p>	
		<p><i>P4: I remember thinking about the things that the horses did whilst in the room with a client. I'm always thinking about how this would be different at the barn; everything is seen through an experiential lens. I think differently about the in between stuff because of the horses. I'm super fascinated by "What is this? This that you're talking to me about. Even though we're not in your problem, you're talking to me about it and I'm so fascinated by your response or your thinking or how you see things or your assumptions." I just can't un-see the world like this. So, everything is colored by Equine.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Data Interpretation</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Perceptual Skills Reason: Example of interpretation of data through a conceptual lens</p> <p>Linguistic: thinking about the things that the horses did whilst in the room with a client, seen through an experiential lens</p> <p>Descriptive: P4 describing how Equine has come into their clinical practice whether they are at the barn or not.</p> <p>Conceptual: I remember thinking about the things that the horses did whilst</p>	

			in the room with a client. I'm always thinking about how this would be different at the barn; everything is seen through an experiential lens. I just can't un-see the world like this. So everything is colored by Equine.	
		1. Self-Assessment		Evaluative Skills
		<i>P1: I couldn't complete the task, even though I was so confident I could do it. I guess for lack of a better term, this humbled me a little bit. Like it's okay to not do the best. It's okay to not know.</i>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Self-Assessment</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Evaluative Skills Reason: assessing and appraising the effectiveness of the therapist. (could also be Experiential Nature)- Example of self- assessment</p> <p>Linguistic: this humbled me a little bit- "It's okay to not know"</p> <p>Descriptive: P1 identified being overconfident and realizing it through the experience of the activities. P1 is letting me know they understood that it is okay to learn.</p>	

		<p><i>P1: Whenever I first started seeing clients for myself, I had to actively think about, “All right. I have to do this. We have to be open. Go back to the horse. Push them a little bit here. Let them be silent here.” So, it felt like I was learning a skill but the skill was still fresh. So, I had to actively think about what I was doing, how to do it...And if it’s not helpful, let’s step back. Whereas whenever I got more experience, the techniques, the thoughts came more effortlessly, where I didn’t have to actively think about it.</i></p>	<p>Conceptual: couldn’t complete the task, humbled me</p> <p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Self-Assessment</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Evaluative Skills Reason: assessing and appraising the effectiveness of the therapist. Example of self- assessment</p> <p>Linguistic: learning a skill but the skill was still fresh, more experience, more effortlessly</p> <p>Descriptive: Conceptual comments to express self-evaluation and adjustment. P1 identified the difference they saw in their self over time.</p> <p>Conceptual: Whenever I first started seeing clients for myself, I had to actively think about, Whereas whenever I got more experience, the techniques, the thoughts came more effortlessly, where I didn’t have to</p>	
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		<p>actively think about it</p> <p><i>P2: For me personally, professionally, the courses taught me slowing down, being present, even in practicum, even in my internships I was using it.</i> <i>“Okay, slow down. Um, like every little activity, every interaction, every question was asked, um, questions that I ask to clients, the puzzle just came together.</i></p> <p><i>P3: I think the best way of encompassing how I went through advanced was just constantly looking at what is isomorphic about who I am in the room and who I am outside of the room. And then how do I bring those together when I work with the horses and what does</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Self-Assessment</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Evaluative Skills</p> <p>Reason: assessing and appraising the effectiveness of the therapist. Example of self- assessment</p> <p>Linguistic: the puzzle just came together.</p> <p>Descriptive: P2 is talking about what they took away EARL and what they learned about things they need to be aware of on a personal and professional level.</p> <p>Conceptual: courses taught me slowing down</p> <p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Self-Assessment</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Evaluative Skills</p>	
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		<p><i>that mean for when I work with my clients. I think because of me taking both of the classes early on in my training I very quickly and continuously brought those things into the room and noticed myself utilizing those things. For example, I was very quickly noticing how I would use what the client brings in the room. Like we would utilize what we do with the horses out at the barn. So, I was very quickly being able to utilize my client's strengths or notice those things, always focused on the process or what's going on differently rather than maybe the content or the complaint of the problem or the issue. So I think that really benefited my training because I very quickly was able to notice and recognize things that helped me in the room.</i></p>	<p>Reason: assessing and appraising the effectiveness of the therapist. Example of self- assessment</p> <p>Linguistic: constantly, isomorphic about who I am in the room and who I am outside of the room,</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 discussing their mindset while in the advanced class and how they were constantly evaluating their personal and professional selves. P3 attributes their level of personal and professional reflection in and after the advanced class to being able to learn about themselves as a therapist early in their education.</p> <p>Conceptual: For example, I was very quickly noticing how I would use what the client brings in the room. Like we would utilize what we do with the horses out at the barn. So I was very quickly being able to utilize my client's strengths or notice</p>	
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			<p>those things, always focused on the process or what's going on differently rather than maybe the content or the complaint of the problem or the issue.</p>	
		<p><i>P3: If I were really to think about when that moment where I could say, oh this is what I'm meaning to do, it would probably have been in the beginning of the advanced class. Being that I was at that point looking more into who I am as a therapist and how that's coming across and then how am I connecting with the horse, how am I promoting particular things within the horse that has them cooperating with me or doing what I'm asking of them and I think all of those things go into that empathic level. I'm somehow able to communicate with a being on a level that's not verbal and able to hold myself in a particular way that has them get that message and I can also do that with them where I can look at their body language and interpret what's going on and then respond accordingly.</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Self-Assessment</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Evaluative Skills</p> <p>Reason: assessing and appraising the effectiveness of the therapist. Example of self- assessment Linguistic: point looking more into who I am as a therapist and how that's coming across</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 describing the moment their learning went into a higher level (think Bateson's levels of learning 2), transition from learning content to learning process. How is what I am doing adding to this? How to communicate non-verbally and read body language</p>	

		<p>Conceptual: then how am I connecting with the horse, how am I promoting particular things within the horse that has them cooperating with me or doing what I'm asking of them and I think all of those things go into that empathic level. In which I'm somehow able to communicate with a being on a level that's not verbal and able to hold myself in a particular way that has them get that message and I can also do that with them where I can look at their body language and interpret what's going on and then respond accordingly.</p>	
		<p><i>P3: When I was in the room, I found myself rushing, getting flustered, getting lost in having to have an objective or a goal, where out at the barn I didn't necessarily have that. I'm able to be in a place where I'm okay with whatever happens happens, I'm gonna have to be flexible, I'm gonna have to just roll with the punches with, you know, taking what I'm given at that moment and utilizing it. But for some reason then translating back</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Self-Assessment</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Evaluative Skills</p> <p>Reason: assessing and appraising the effectiveness of the therapist. Example of self-assessment</p>

		<p><i>into the therapy room it was very difficult for me to figure out how to do that without a horse or how to do that those four walls around me. And so, for me definitely pacing as well as being able to not hold onto that goal so tightly became a challenge when in the therapy room. Out at the barn you see movement almost immediately, so it was hard for me to see lack of movement in the therapy room and then determine what to do next. Where out at the barn we could have no movement, a ton of movement, but I always knew what to do next 'cause I'm always relating it back to the horse, I'm always relating it back to something behavioral the client did. Um, something that was going on in that moment, which I think without having that, um, experiential or hands on piece made it very difficult for me to, um, understand how to then practice in the room.</i></p>	<p>Linguistic: I found myself rushing, getting flustered, getting lost, difficult for me to figure out how to do that without a horse</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 discussing a challenge they experienced due to getting their training wheels in Equine prior to traditional therapy. This is self-assessment as they were able to recognize and reflect on how they could be more effective in a non-traditional therapy setting with an experiential nature</p> <p>Conceptual: Out at the barn you see movement almost immediately, so it was hard for me to see lack of movement in the therapy room and then determine what to do next. Where out at the barn we could have no movement, a ton of movement, but I always knew what to do next 'cause I'm always relating it back to the horse, I'm always relating it back to something</p>	
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			<p>behavioral the client did. Um, something that was going on in that moment, which I think without having that, um, experiential or hands on piece made it very difficult for me to, um, understand how to then practice in the room.</p>	
		<p><i>P5: I think I started with the substance abuse groups and they were big groups of people. And so, there was a couple of us interns and [a staff therapist] running them. And that was overwhelming because I was like, there is just so many people out there. I was like, how do you manage all those people? How do you remember their names? How do you know what questions to ask? In the first class I realized that my weakness was that I didn't know how to connect with someone. And then the class really, really helped me do that and so when I went into, my first practicum in the master's program, my feedback was "you join with your clients really, really well and you're always just in the moment with them. Like you're just talking with them and that's all you're interested in doing and you're not thinking about your next question." I learned how to connect with one person really, really well. And so, learning how</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Self-Assessment</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Evaluative Skills</p> <p>Reason: assessing and appraising the effectiveness of the therapist. Example of self- assessment</p> <p>Linguistic: big groups of people, overwhelming, learned how to connect with one person really, really well.</p> <p>Descriptive: P5 discussing their assessment of their ability to join with clients and their uncertainty of how that will translate over into groups</p>	

		<p><i>to do the groups, I realized I wanted to get into a side conversation with one person and have a one-on-one talk. Learning how to zoom out took a while.</i></p>	<p>Conceptual: So, like I learned how to connect with one person really, really well. And so, learning how to do the groups, I realized I wanted to get into a side conversation with one person and have a one-on-one talk. Learning how to zoom out took a while</p>	
		<p><i>P6: A certain clinical group was definitely a struggle for me because I didn't know how to connect with them. I couldn't find that thing that got them comfortable with me and I tried to be, cool and hip, and all. But for some reason, I just could not connect with them. But at the end of it, I remember, we had an amazing session with them. Looking back, I think that it was just the time, you can't just push someone into opening up. I think, for me, it was just learning to be patient and learning to be comfortable in that uncomfortable fate of not connecting. Obviously if you're being told to do something, you don't want to do, you're going to have a very different reaction than if you're actually excited about it. We tailored our sessions to letting them pick or at least have some choices on what we did, and that made a difference. It's kind of finding that balance</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Self-Assessment</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Evaluative Skills</p> <p>Reason: assessing and appraising the effectiveness of the therapist. Example of self- assessment</p> <p>Linguistic: struggle for me, didn't know how to connect, Descriptive: I think, for me, it was just learning to be patient. And learning to be comfortable in that uncomfortable fate of not connecting. (p6 stating what they needed to learn)</p>	

		<p><i>between making sure that this session's still therapeutic and hitting the pre-determined goals but at the same time, allowing our clients to have the freedom, to do what they want to do.</i></p>	<p>Because I think every week we went in with a plan, and we were like, okay, we're doing this and they're like, no, we don't want to. When obviously if you're being told to do something you don't want to do, you're going to have a very different reaction than if you're actually excited about it. Um, so I think we kind of tailored our sessions to letting them pick. Or at least have some choices on what we did, and that made a difference. (P6 discusses how the team needed to change their approach in order to connect with the group)</p> <p>Conceptual: I don't know if it was because we came from different backgrounds, or because I've never experienced being in foster care like they had been. It was just, every week, I was</p>	
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		<p>like, I want to connect with these girls, I just don't know how to. (P6 sharing her exasperation over not connecting and how they processed what factors could be leading to the disconnect)</p> <p>So, it's kind of finding that balance between making sure that this session's still therapeutic and hitting the pre-determined goals but at the same time, allowing our clients to have the freedom, to do what they want to do. (P6 talking about the processes of assessing the effectiveness of their work and adjusting accordingly. (which are also conceptual skills because they are looking at this from a systemic lens))</p>	
		<p>2. Experiential Nature</p>	
		<p><i>P1: The takeaway would be that the equine work is not only the therapist client relationship. That you have all the other relationships</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p>

		<p><i>intertwined. Something I learned from a client was that they really enjoyed the client horse relationship. The client horse relationship was very helpful for them.</i></p> <p><i>The establishment of that relationship was due to the comfort that the equine specialist showed around the horse. Almost showing the client that trust is possible and reiterating that every week, not through words but through actions.</i></p> <p><i>As therapists, allowing the client to experience that relationship, that comfort, that safety with the horse for a part of the session. That was something that we as therapists wanted to offer to the client.</i></p>	<p>Sub-Theme: Self-Assessment</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Evaluative Skills</p> <p>Reason: process of assessing and appraising the effectiveness of therapeutic activities.- Assessment of Experiential aspect</p> <p>Descriptive: P1 is explaining that they believe the experience of establishing a relationship with a horse was helpful in demonstrating trust as this was accomplished through actions.</p>	
		<p><i>P3: I think also seeing the experiential nature, the hands-on nature of clients being able to change and do something different in the moment also made it impactful. I think that allowed me to see how offering things such as homework (when in the room) gives clients something to do, to try, to expand upon. This became something that I was constantly seeking and looking forward to. I was seeing experiential work be done and within a couple sessions these clients were</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Self-Assessment</p> <p>Sub-Domain: Evaluative Skills</p> <p>Reason: process of assessing and appraising the effectiveness of therapeutic activities.- Assessment of Experiential aspect</p>	

		<p><i>having impactful sessions and experiences that helped them change quite quickly and then I go into the room and I have the same number of sessions and we're still having the same conversations and saying to myself, "Well how can I have that same thing happen in the room?"</i></p>	<p>Linguistic: experiential nature, the hands-on nature, how offering things such as homework (when in the room) gives clients something</p> <p>Descriptive: P3 talking about the impact of seeing how quickly changed occurred with an experiential component</p> <p>Conceptual: I was seeing experiential work be done and within a couple sessions these clients were having impactful sessions and experiences that helped them change quite quickly and then I go into the room and I have the same number of sessions and we're still having the same conversations and saying to myself, "Well how can I have that same thing happen in the room?"</p>	
		<p><i>P4: The experience helps you to make your ideas tangible. It manifests them in a physical way and that helps you to learn. Anything that's experiential teaches you in a different way than when you hear a lecture, or</i></p>	<p>Master Theme: Learning through reflection</p> <p>Sub-Theme: Self-Assessment</p>	

		<p><i>you read a chapter. Something kinetic about the learning that sticks with you in a way that something else might not. I discovered who I was, what I wanted to do in the room, what kind of therapist I am, and what I lean towards by physically doing things at the barn. Discovery is exciting and different from choosing something, it's not preplanned. There's something to discovering and that's the kind of learning that happens out at the barn and in the world. There's something about experiencing the lesson versus learning it in a different way, that is hard to unlearn. It's hard to forget.</i></p>	<p>Sub-Domain: Evaluative Skills</p> <p>Reason: process of assessing and appraising the effectiveness of therapeutic activities.- Assessment of Experiential aspect Linguistic: make your ideas tangible, by physically doing things at the barn</p> <p>Descriptive: P4 discussing experiential work having a different impact on people. P4 discovering herself was her assessing herself as a therapist</p> <p>Conceptual: The experience helps you to make your ideas tangible. It manifests them in a physical way and that helps you to learn.</p>	
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Biographical Sketch

Natalie Rothman was born and raised in South Florida, where she attended a mixture of private and public schools. Natalie excelled in academics and participated in extracurricular activities, such as marching band. After her high school graduation, Natalie moved to Tampa, Florida, to attend the University of South Florida. She pursued a degree in Psychology and a minor in Gerontology. Natalie was passionate about her studies and student leadership as she was president of Hillel, the Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, and was a member of the Chi Omega Fraternity.

After earning a Bachelor's degree, Natalie moved back to South Florida to begin working in the mental health field and continuing her education. Within three months of moving home, Natalie was fortunate enough to be offered a job working at Oakwood Center of the Palm Beaches, a community mental health hospital and Backer Act receiving facility. At the time, Natalie was a Group Facilitator II, whose job was to facilitate psychotherapy groups, psychosocial groups, and co-facilitate partial hospitalization groups. As Natalie worked at Oakwood Center, she was also attending the Masters' degree in Mental Health Counseling (MHC) program at Nova Southeastern University (NSU), full time. Having these two experiences paired, assisted in Natalie's understanding of the ideas and concepts being taught. She learned about counseling practices at the same time as she was experiencing them, unknowingly setting the foundation for her passion of experiential learning.

After graduating the MHC program, Natalie became a registered mental health intern, and began working as an in-home therapist for children and families. During this time, Natalie experienced various family dynamics and determined the work she was

doing was too cookie cutter. Natalie became burnt out very quickly and searched for another perspective, which is when she found the field of Family Therapy and the Ph.D. program at NSU. Given the postmodern nature of the program, Natalie was curious to learn more about the systemic approach and decided to pursue a Ph.D. in Family Therapy.

As a Ph.D. student, Natalie participated in the Introduction to Equine Assisted Family Therapy course during a moment of self-exploration in her academic career. Natalie walked away from this experience with tangible insight into her clinical approach; something she had been searching for since the beginning of her career. Natalie then sought more opportunities to further this experience as she began to work at Stable Place, an Equine Assisted Family Therapy facility. Throughout the development of this dissertation, Natalie has continued to work at Stable Place and was promoted to Clinical Supervisor.

Also, during her time as a Ph.D. student at NSU, Natalie worked at the Brief Therapy Institute (BTI) as a Graduate Assistant, which assisted in her knowledge of managing a community-based family therapy clinic. Rothman worked with a variety of clients at BTI as well as in private practice at Positive Start Counseling Services Inc. She has presented at conferences and participated in Equine Assisted Family Therapy focused studies in an effort to expand the limited body of research on the topic.