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OF HEALTHY WOMAN AND HORSES

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
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Abstract

This thesis addressed the relational health resources provided by horses to a group of healthy women in a small town in New Zealand. The mutualistic symbiotic interaction between humans and animals is slowly gaining credibility amongst health professionals. Although this beneficial relationship has a long past in practice, it has a relatively short history within academia and is marginalised in relation to mainstream health research.

Within a salutogenic approach to health research, this study used an ethnographic methodology bending and blurring of traditional boundaries within a feminist framework. A dominant/subordinate approach to blend quantitative and qualitative research is employed, with the quantitative study as the subordinate partner. The results from a questionnaire, based on Liang, Tracy, Taylor, Williams, Jordan and Miller's (2002) relational health indices, confirm that the growth-fostering relationships horses make available to women are authenticity, engagement and empowerment. This quantitative part of the study is reported in full in the Appendices E and Q. The dominant qualitative study involved a chiasmatic procedure with two focus group discussions and two interpretative communities blending qualitative data gathering and analysis to give voice to the perspectives of women engaged in daily experiences with horses.

Seventeen emergent themes are synthesised into five growth promoting qualities extending Liang et al.'s (2002) study to include a connection to other humans and connection to nature which reweaves the dichotomy between nature and culture. Further research is called for in the domain of health psychology to investigate the salutogenic effects of this reconnection with nature through sharing our lives with animals, especially horses.

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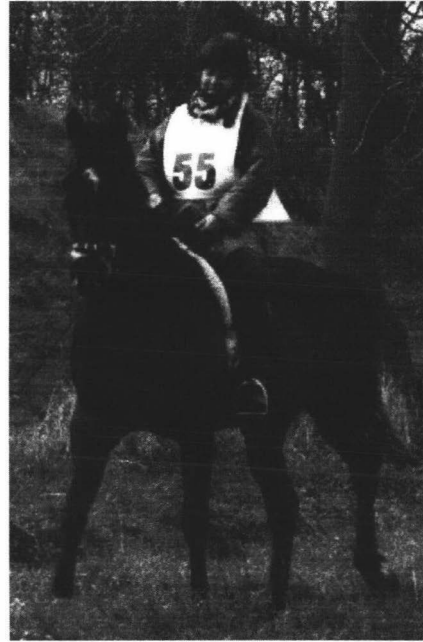
I would not have been able to write up this thesis without the support of the local Riding Club and the women participants. Thank you to the women participants who made this study special. I appreciated your time and commitment to the process.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the horses I have shared my life with, particularly Pastiche who was so forgiving of my inadequacies. A gentle mare, she taught me how to experience joy in the moment and to be more patient, skills I was able to transfer to other parts of my life.



Photograph 1: Author and Pastiche sharing an intimate moment



Photograph 2: Author and Pastiche enjoying an endurance competition

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Photograph 3: Besotted beginnings, the 1930s
[By kind permission of Rosa, a woman participant]

Chapter 1 Introduction

I begin with a short biography, as a 'light' reflexive commentary, which will permeate this thesis. As a young girl, I was a female centaur (!). I played at being a horse, cantering around, snorting and kicking up my heels. I immersed myself in all things equine, I sought out horse toys, books and films and was described as obsessive. My family reinforced this passion and on my eighth birthday I was given riding lessons. As a horse crazy teenager, I spent long hours at the stables caring for horses. Since then, apart from a period at University as an undergraduate student, I have never been without horses in my life. I have owned and competed with horses, now I breed and train young horses. At present I share my life with seven equine individuals and an understanding human partner whom of course 'likes' horses.

Horses have shaped who I am. I'm not a wife or a lecturer with a horse, I am myself. As a species I am indebted to their generosity of spirit and wonder at their beauty as they gallop around the paddock. Relationships with horses have enriched my life, as with them I can be myself. Also, through a love of horses I am able to make friends with other women that hold mutual interests. Whenever I meet a horse crazy friend a topic of discussion will always be our horses. Horse stories are shared in many of my daily encounters and there is much similar anecdotal evidence appearing on the internet (Midkiff, 2002; Matthis, 2001).

Rider Interrupted

Meyer (2002, p. 19) reported in an equestrian magazine "On April 20, 1999, Kacey Ruegsegger thought she was going to die. Huddled under a computer table in the Columbine High School library, she listened in terror as Eric Harris shot and killed the student hiding next to her, then turned his shotgun on her. The blast ripped holes in her shoulder and hand, leaving her critically wounded and psychologically devastated". The article continued "What brought about her healing? Time, faith, and her connection with horses. 'After Columbine, Kacey just didn't feel safe around people,' says her mother. 'From her perspective, people were either trying to kill themselves or her, and she wanted no part of it. The only folks she felt safe around were horse people'. She makes the most of what the horses helped give back to her: a happy life".

This compelling story is one of many such cogent anecdotes about the healing power of horses. Anecdotalism should be taken more seriously as Bekoff (2002, p. 47), a cognitive ethologist states "the plural of anecdote is data". Despite many such narratives, there is a lack of academic research that specifically investigates the relationship between humans and horses (Endenburg, 2001) let alone the special relationship between women and horses that enhance the health, well-ness and quality of life of the woman. As in Root's (2000) study it is heuristically inevitable that my passion for horses will merge into my academic research.

I have been stimulated to undertake this research because of some recent publications that have made me realise I am not alone in thinking there is a special connection between women and horses. The first, *"Of women and horses"* (GaWaNi Pony Boy, 2000) contains essays by various horsewomen, including artists, photographers, Olympic riders, horse trainers, equine facilitated therapists, clinical psychologists and academics. The chapter by Toth (2000), *"The psychology of women and horses"*, showed me the possibility of academic research in this field, hence the title of this research proposal *"Of healthy women and horses"*. Three publications recently have also been influential, *"She flies without wings: How horses touch a woman's soul"* written by Mary Midkiff (2001) and *"The Tao of equus"* (2001) and *"Riding between the worlds: Expanding our potential through the way of the horse"* (2003) both by Linda Kohanov, an equine facilitated psychotherapist. In this role she has collected thousands of anecdotes that show the horse is effective at helping humans "reintegrate mind and body, increase awareness of unconscious behaviour patterns, and develop the self confidence, stress management and assertiveness skills that lead to increased success in relationships" (Kohanov, 2001, p. xviii). Kohanov (2001, 2003) and Midkiff (2001) both emphasise the transformational healing qualities that women derive from their relationship with horses¹.

Initially, Kohanov (2001) is reluctant to share her experiences with horses in an effort not to compromise the integrity of 'academic' studies on horse-human interactions. However, she later concedes that she is not just horse 'crazy' but has a legitimate, dynamic phenomenon to reveal. These thought processes parallel mine, I believe it is timely that such relationships, so important to the everyday health of some women are made patent to others.

In this investigation, the epistemology constructionism will be utilised, with an ontology of relativism, addressing the relational health resources that horses provide for women. The meanings of horses to women's health will be co-created through transactional dialogue, in a study relying heavily on the methodology of ethnography, where the reconstructed meaning of social and linguistic forces are exposed to value mediated interpretation. This approach, taken from feminist research is rare in science and relatively new to health psychology, it does not attempt to separate the knower from the known.

The paradigm will use my experience with horses to find an understanding through these co-constructions to give a more informed and sophisticated reconstruction. Such co-constructions will be based in the language domain, and through dialectical interchange are socially and historically contingent. Multiple sources of data will be located as these interactions will take place in focus groups and interpretative communities with horsewomen of different ages. Also, a questionnaire will be employed.

In the following chapters I will discuss the research problem in the context of feminist inquiry and women's health and then present the research question. A literature review will follow that clarifies and justifies the development of the specific research question and places it into the context of academic research.

Footnotes

1. Interestingly enough both Kohanov (2001, 2003) and Midkiff (2001) dedicate their books to horses that share their lives. Similarly many academics researching human-nonhuman animal interactions acknowledge their animal companions (Keil, 1990; Taggart, 1996; Burgess, 1997; Darling, 1997; Silva, 1998; Johnson, 2001).

Chapter 2 Research problem

The research problem, that is, the relationship between women and horses, is located within a socio-cultural and historical context of gender and power relations where feminist inquiry of women's health is examined from a salutogenic perspective. A discussion about women's relationship with animals and specifically horses then leads to the development of the research question. The history of human-horse relationships is discussed and a connection to the theoretical relational health model is made.

2.1 Gender and power relationships

As women are not a homogenous group so feminists are not either. They include liberal, socialist, radical and Marxist (Berman, 1992) also lesbian, Maori, ecofeminist and standpoint feminists. However, in all their guises feminists attempt to value difference and multiplicity; understand women's experiences; and give voice to their social constructs. As feminist discourse is a youthful academic field, it can be rebellious against the prior normative patriarchal discourse providing evidence of Foucauldian power and resistance in action (Pincus, 1996).

In the next few sections I will discuss the health of women against a backdrop of andocentric research. Then I shall deal with the principles of feminist inquiry, the research methods employed and then go on to merge these with research into the health of women and human-nonhuman animal relationships.

2.1.1 Women and health

Women's health is a contemporary issue, because according to Stern (1996) we are fecund, we live a long time and we have less power than men. Patriarchal societies implicitly place men as the norm and woman as the 'other', in such cultures health research has been primarily for and about men. Only the reproductive capacity of women was considered worthy of study (Lee, 1998). Research on women's health is addressing this imbalance but the majority of the contemporary texts on women's health actually only cover women's illnesses. They include chapters on heart disease, cancer, reproductive disorders and menstruation while stressing the importance of medical screening (Wang, 1997; Waller & McPherson, 2003). Biomedical positivism still pervades and champions reductionism so risk behaviours such as smoking and drug abuse are covered as intra-individual factors. The complex social and cultural lives of women are discussed but in the context of women's illnesses rather than their health.

This thesis is based within the domain of health psychology and will use Ratcliff's (2002) discussion to cogently merge the issues of male domination and health research. She considered that four issues must be critiqued. They are the reliance on the biomedical model, technological favouritism, as well as economic issues in 'for profit intrusion' and finally the gender based organisation of our society.

Objective positivist science has considered the body to be a machine, thus medicine has sought mechanistic answers to solve problems. Diagnostic tests and monitors dehumanise the patient as doctors spend less time interacting with the patient as a whole being. Modern doctors are required to spend so much time developing the technical skills required to use, or interpret the data provided, that they devalue information that can be gleaned by merely talking with and observing the patient. An obsession with probability and statistical norms takes precedence over the individual and their immediate social situation. A feminist stance may ask the question "who makes decision about which procedures are chosen and for what reasons?" The removal of the body of patient from the diagnosis would be a concern with telehealth intervention and Keefe and Blumenthal (2004) carefully consider ethical and legal concerns when doctors implement internet telehealth intervention programmes and procedures. Another dimension that could be addressed is the collectivity of bodies that a supportive group of others might involve – and its potential for health empowerment. This thesis will show that the presence of a group of supportive others can be empowering.

In our society, health care providers are required to make a profit. They employ accountants that are interested in the economic profit margins. Does this sound like a masculinist concept? They favour the use of devices, surgical procedures and pharmaceuticals rather than developing long term incentive structures to enhance a more complex system of sustained social support networks. The feminist position here would be political, stating that only the rich or insured have access to such a biomedical health care system. However, if value were placed upon social support mechanisms maintaining health this may favour previously marginalised women.

The issues of women in research and the health of women have developed from patriarchal and andocentric assumptions that are insidious in academic research, including the health field. Within the academic community it is mostly men who are the paper reviewers and journal editors in psychology, and as such they are the gatekeepers of knowledge. Taking Foucault's model of context based analysis these gatekeepers have the power to control what should be known (Ratcliff, 2002). So the construction of our knowledge of health is context dependent and based within the dominant ideologies created by men with their standpoint and biases. Thus the

scientific body of knowledge about health is not universal as we are led to believe. Many of the stories of women are absent.

I intend to address this absence by choosing to research with women, mostly middle aged, as Gergen (2001) suggests that psychology as a discipline has little to say about middle aged women. However, Lee (1998) states that the research participants in women's health tend to be employed and middle aged, perhaps because of their likeness to the researcher herself! I am yet another middle aged female researcher. While it is the case that a context dependent approach means that research with a specific group cannot be generalised to others, the value of enhancing our understanding of middle aged women's lives remains – especially in response to their frequent positioning as 'objects' of masculinist inquiry into feminine 'deficit' (e.g. conventional menopause research).

2.1.2 Women and research

Feminists have ignored animal research and Birke (2002) lists only three ecofeminist writers that focus on animals in research. They are primarily concerned with food production techniques and wild animals in the environment. Researchers into the human-nonhuman animal bond and ecopsychologists have tended to downplay gender and perpetuate scientific narratives with gender stereotypes. I have found no studies that have explicitly merged feminism with research into the value of the human-nonhuman animal bond. Birke (2002) has set down the gauntlet and attempts to place the research of this very special bond into the academic arena, hopefully her paper will generate much dialogue. The meanings of gender and animals are complex and powerful and both disciplines of inquiry would benefit from greater interaction.

In feminist enquiry Montell (1999) identifies five epistemological principles that are fundamental to any feminist method and permeate this research. They include being gender explicit but also challenge the separation of the researcher and the researched. Thirdly, a central tenet from early feminism is consciousness raising which hopefully leads to empowerment of women. Belsey (2002) states that externalising a life story helps the teller gain a reflexive perspective, a valuable insight on their daily life. Finally implicit in all feminist research are ethical concerns.

In feminist research gender is explicit; it is a dynamic social construct which people perform (Butler, 1990). It informs our observation and understanding of nonhuman animals interacting with us. We should be aware that animals in domestication perform and act out a role defined by the confines of their environment. Birke (2002, para. 9) gives an example from the horseworld

she knows, the cultural difference associated with raising stallions, “These magnificent animals can be difficult and dangerous or docile and easy to handle depending on their ‘socialisation’ by humans”. So domestication could be a historical process of role performances. This reminds me of an often used quote regarding horses which I cannot cite, “Tell a gelding, ask a mare and discuss it with a stallion”.

With regard to Montell’s (1999) second principle researchers employing an androcentric stance recruit subjects to study, objectifying them, whereas, pro-feminist psychologists consider there should be a parity between researcher and researched, as the unviolated voice of the subject is considered as a legitimate source of scientific knowledge (Gergen, 2001). Ali (2002) believes that groups of patients may create new forms of knowledge as they interpret their lived experiences. Thus a plurivocal assumption of knowledge production reveals an anti-positivist view of conceptualising knowledge, and is grounded in both Foucauldian and feminist theories. This convergence of Foucault’s theory of resistance and the emancipatory stance of feminists about knowledge making is utilised in this research as we (as women) are aware of the power differentials that may arise within the research arena.

Reflexivity is common in feminist research. According to Montell (1999) feminist researchers should use the personal and be reflexive at all stages of the research process, not viewing the researcher as a possible source of contamination of the data but to value and include the researcher as a resource, incorporating their personal experiences not denying them. The sections above aim to justify and locate this investigation in the field of women’s health. This research will be reviewed in Chapter 12 within the framework of these five epistemological principles. I next examine the role of storytelling in feminist research.

Humans live storied lives and feminist researchers are aware that knowledge is socially grounded and influenced by historical and cultural factors. They have set about a theory of emancipatory knowledge building (Ratcliff, 2002) and hold the view that a female experience is different from a males, fundamental to this was discovering the stories of women and their everyday lives and constructing a ‘gynocentric feminis’ (Gergen, 2001) as a compensatory stance.

Miller & Stiver (1997) have said that by listening to women’s stories about their lives they found that their sense of self and their sense of worth were grounded in their ability to make and maintain relationships. White (2004) adds that the lives and the relationships of a person are shaped by the knowledge and stories that they communicate to give meaning to their experiences.

Based on hundreds of women's experiences, Pincus (2004) proposes that in the retelling of life stories we find a common experience and are strengthened by the knowledge that the 'personal is political'. She questions the medicalization of the bodies of women, preferring to place women's experiences within the social, economic and political forces that determine our lives. She encourages women to value and share their own insights and experiences to create a useful body of knowledge to determine the quality of health.

Although the field of health psychology has taken narratology seriously it has had a pathogenic focus. In a later section I shall discuss the merits of taking a salutogenic perspective with insider stories about the daily lived experiences of women to come to an understanding of how we make sense of who we are. Women listening to women's stories provide a less distorted viewpoint, with allowances made for the distortion of reconstructed memories. Perhaps there is less distortion if they are interpreted by other women. In this study I will accumulate the phenomenological reports of woman and by adding layers by the different tellings, a truth will emerge (Gergen, 2001). I will reclaim women's voices so that an understanding of the health relationships between women and their horses is explicated.

2.2 The relationship between women and horses

Horses can provide a paradox, they can free us or hurt us (literally) and how we relate to a horse with trust or power becomes a metaphor for our life. Tyler (1994) notes that horses sense incongruity between affect and behaviour and display confusion until their handler is in a state of internal consistency. According to Irwin (2002) relating to horses forces humans to face our shadow selves and discover freedom and inspiration and experience exhilaration. Thomas (2001, p. 5) in a newsletter for The Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) states that she has heard the following statement many times "If it wasn't for my horse, I don't know how I could deal with the stresses of my life". She adds there is a 'magic' about horses and their ability to heal people and says that "it doesn't matter what you do with horses, being around horses in and of themselves changes lives for the better".

Taylor, Klein, Lewis, Grenewald, Gurung & Updegraff (2000) criticised the academic research on stress, noting that the majority of participants were men. Their innovative quantitative research on stress in women revealed a gender difference. When women were stressed the hormone oxytocin is released, which produces the 'tend and befriend' response, a calming effect. They purport that social ties reduce women's risk of disease by lowering blood pressure, heart rate and blood cholesterol levels. The female hormone oestrogen enhances this calming

effect of oxytocin, whilst, in men, testosterone reduces the effects of oxytocin. They add that the special kind of talk that women do when they're with other women is a very healing experience. This could explain the feeling of connection that comes with talking to other horsewomen about their horses.

In their research on social connections Liang, Tracy, Taylor, Williams, Jordan & Miller (2002) posit the relational health model and indicate that the quality and nature of women's relationships may be more meaningful than their quantity or structure. Westcott & Jordan (1997) state that quality relationships give an increase in sense of self-worth, vitality, validation, a knowledge of self and others, and a desire for further connection. I believe that the relationships women have with horses can provide such quality to enable women's psychological development and well-being.

2.3 Research question

In this investigation I am interested in the relational resources that horses provide for a woman's health at different points in her life span, so that a woman might be able to make sense of self and define herself as a healthy individual within society. Liang et al. (2002) suggest that relational health is positively related to good self-concept, mood state and sense of connection. From this I have constructed the following research question:

What are the relational health resources that horses provide for women?

The rationale, justification and significance of the proposed research problem and question will now be considered. I believe the issue of women's health and their relationships with horses is worthy of study as it is timely in the context of health psychology (to research health not illness), the psychology of women's health, and to locate an individual's health within a wider social context.

In clinical psychology there has been an explosion in the last two decades of studies investigating the beneficial effects of animals on human health in therapeutic situations (Voelker, 1995). Within the psychology of women a theoretical paradigm has emerged, the relational health model, for the assessment of women's psychological well-being (Jordan, 1992). I have been innovative, in that I have set out to investigate the synergistic effects of the

relational health model as applied to a group of women and their relationship with horses.

Unlike previous studies in health psychology, that is, research on individuals who are ill; this research will not be located in a clinical or therapeutic setting. Health psychology has largely (not exclusively) ignored the concept of what constitutes health in preference to research concerned with the meaning of illness to the individual or the efficacy of interventions targeted at previously identified 'at risk' individuals. Bolam & Chamberlain (2003, p. 215) argue that "health psychology has too often focused on the individual" which they consider to be politically retrogressive. They advocate the "social model of the person in-context" with a "greater awareness of relational and contextual aspects" which includes "ethical, moral and political elements of health psychology".

Until 1999 research on health discourse was relatively rare according to Morgan (1999) and this research will provide new information, the narratives of the healthy horsewomen and it will also locate these individuals in the socio-cultural and historical milieu in which they find themselves. Morgan (1999) takes a Foucauldian perspective of Matarazzo's definition of health psychology stating that knowledge may improve health and well-being of others and Murray (2000) promotes the use of emancipatory narratives of health. Thus this investigation may provide a potentially fecund area of research for the future.

The significance of this research concerns its aim to bring some of the social relationships women have into focus using a combination of qualitative and quantitative inquiry to enrich understanding (Reker & Chamberlain, 2000) and to develop the whole perspective from the viewpoint of horsewomen themselves. I am aware that this investigation will be pioneering and inherently risky, but I aim to present findings that describe the relational health resources that horses provide for women and gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon.

The relationship between horses and women's health has an interesting development and I will now discuss the historical context and the importance of power associated with such a development.

2.4 History of human-horse relationship

The historical relationship between humans and horses is a long and not such a happy one. Evidence reveals an opportunistic use of horses by hunter-gatherers (Borrero & Franco, 1997) and over-hunting caused extinction of horses in North America by 10,000 years ago and a retreat to Eastern Europe and Central Asia. 6000 years ago horses were domesticated as

nomadic pastoralists needed a beast of burden to carry and transport an accumulation of belongings to a new site. The domestication of such a large, prey animal must have required considerable courage and knowledge of animal behaviour (Clutton-Brock, 1992). This history of differing perceptions of horses by hunters and pastoralists has created a conceptual paradox of domination and trust. I shall discuss the issue of power and domination first before examining the trust relationship between humans and horses.

Since domestication men have used horses for war and transportation. Horses have represented status and wealth, strength, speed and nobility. Even individual horses have been made famous, for example, Bucephalus enabled Alexander the Great to found the largest empire the world has yet known (Clutton-Brock, 1992). This patriarchal dominion, with power over horses is extended to a utilitarian language. In the Old Testament there are four Hebrew words and in Medieval France the language had sixteen words to describe horses as they related to useful items for man. Thus language perpetuates the subordination and oppression of horses as well as women, reinforcing patriarchal dualisms which continue to objectify women and nature (in this case horses). This thesis investigates the relationship between members of two groups of repressed others, but only from the perspective of women.

The Cartesian worldview of the separation of men from women, nature from culture, and mind from body is rejected by ecofeminists like Birkeland (1993). Ecofeminists see a parallel between the domination of women and that of nature (horses) and take a holistic view regarding humans as part of a community that includes all living systems (Gruen, 1993) which I consider relevant to this thesis. Like Berman (1992) I refuse to separate my emotions from my analysis as I re-create a language of feelings and experiences with horses, this despite the deeply entrenched androcentric bias of our language, which controls meanings.

The role of horses significantly changed in the Western world during the twentieth century. Technological development superseded the working horse and horses joined humans in leisure pursuits. Thousands of years of masculine domination with the dichotomies of thought over emotion, logic over intuition, territory over relationship and force over collaboration are being challenged (Kohanov, 2001). No longer the exclusive domain of men, outside of the horse racing industry and horse polo, it is mostly girls and women that interact with horses (Matthis, 2001). Equestrianism is one of the few Olympic sports in which male and female riders with their horses compete on equal terms. The power of a man's muscular body does not facilitate the trust required in a relationship when a horse is galloping at 50kph at a solid obstacle over a metre high. There are 9000 members of the Pony Club in New Zealand and from my experience at summer camps, most of these will be 'horse crazy' girls. I have been a member of three

different adult riding clubs and in all of them the female membership was more than 90%.

I have to admit as a keeper of horses I might well be exploiting them, as they are not necessarily consenting individuals. However, they do snicker a welcome when I come into view and freely approach me in the paddock. When close they smell my neck and hair before taking up a position for allogrooming (mutual grooming). This interaction is based on mutual trust, and does not include androcentric human language, it is a more primitive one based on the sensory modalities of smell and touch. A relationship with a horse is more than words can express; it simultaneously fulfils a synaesthesia of perceptions. I feel uplifted after connection with my horses, they are spiritual beings.

Such perceptions are difficult to define and measure within the field of biomedical health psychology that demands strict quantitative data gathering and analysis to be located within a theoretical framework. However, I will attempt to place the research problem in a theoretical background for the purposes of developing a measuring instrument to quantitatively assess the relational health resources that horses provide for women.

2.5 Theoretical background: Connecting to the relational model

Concepts such as speciesism, dominion versus eco-connection paradigms, and animals as substitute family members or friends within attachment and relational health theories are considered below with an emphasis on feminist research.

Speciesism derives from the human belief that animals are given for human exploitation as a resource. Most of our history with horses has been a utilitarian relationship, based on our need. Similarly, Descartes proposed that culture and nature were separate. This philosophy has led generations of (white) men to believe that they were masters of nature and separate from, or above, it (Kheel, 1993). Women's studies and research into the value of human-nonhuman animal relationships are newcomers to the academy (Birke 2002). Each challenges a form of oppression and both were nurtured in the 1970s with an increasing awareness of the connections between women and nature. Deep ecologists consider anthropocentrism a problem when discussing nature but Hibbard (2003) states the problem is one of androcentrism whereby the exploitation and oppression of women and nature is condoned by existing patriarchal social structures.

The schema that dominates the concept of subject persists, the Derridean view of the hierarchy of subjects and values, that is, men above women and finally animals (Hearne, 1994). With

regard to language, identity, species and understanding the other, Wittgenstein is reported to have said that “If a lion could talk we could not understand him” (cited in Hearne, 1994, p. 213) but I disagree as some animals do communicate to some people who do understand them. There are in the horse world, men and women who are considered to be able to communicate with horses, they are the ‘horse whisperers’. Recently this phenomenon has been exposed in the media with Monty Robert's 1997 autobiography “*The man who listen to horses*” and Robert Redford's (1998) film “*The horse whisperer*”. This certainly re-orientates the alterity of the non-human other, rather than the subjectivity of species as different they can be equated with singularity.

However, power differentials in the domination theme continued in psychology, and to protect a notion of difference and distance between man and woman, nature and culture, animals, including horses have been reduced to archetypes, disguised impulses or to mere symbols in language or imagery (Henderson, 1999) as a form of psychological disenfranchisement.

In this study I hope to counter this philosophy and return culture to nature. I am reminded of Bekoff's (1993) discussion about the term ‘culture’. The biological meaning is to enhance and facilitate the growth of a group of organisms, whereas the social sciences limit the meaning to groups of humans. He adds that the reunification of the word culture is evident in describing groups of humans who share their lives with animals, such as, ‘horsiculture’, where humans form communities with specific discourses and practices.

Nebbe (1991) argues that humans have lost respect for life and that culture has alienated itself from nature, causing environmental crises with materialistic and technological fervour. A theoretical framework of reconnection, that is, forming relationships with horses may derive from a synergistic convergence of the eco-centered thinking of ecopsychology (Roszak, Gomes & Kanner, 1995) and ecofeminism (Birkeland, 1993). This reconnection view is upheld by Kellert (2002) who proposes a similar progression in the evaluative health benefits of direct human-nonhuman animal interactions between children and nature. The nine stages of values typology are utilitarian, dominionistic, negativistic, humanistic, symbolic, aesthetic, scientific, naturalistic and finally moralistic. These developmental stages are based in the cognitive domain and reflect the historical changes in our attitudes towards and about animals.

The Biophilia hypothesis is the “innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms” (Wilson, 1993, p. 31). From this hypothesis an emotional affiliation to horses would be possible. Like attachment theory it is not a single instinct but a complex of learning rules. Attachment theory derived from ethology is a biologically determined motivational system that

derives a need for security. This security is found in the proximity of another, the attachment figure. Bowlby (1988) states that this pattern of attachment tends to persist over time and influences later interactions with others and the development of new relationships (Steele, 2002). Horses can provide a safe, non-judgmental attachment figure, although arguably not at the earliest developmental stages.

According to Weiss (1991) adult attachment is a mental construct that helps to maintain an inner state of well-being. During attachment Schorpe (2003) describes engagement as contingent responsiveness and expands this as a non-verbal dialogue of moment to moment, affective mirroring. Such bonds of attachment may occur in a relationship with an animal (Sable, 2003) and Kohanov (2001, p. 8) describes the “mirror, mirror in your stall” when introducing her horse Nakia and the intense emotional dynamics they shared. The continued proximity of daily interactions with horses may be significant in strengthening the attachment bond which can facilitate personal growth. The three concentric rings of the social convoy which link concepts of attachment with social support can be considered here as women centre their lives around key relationships as women “define themselves through connection” (Sable, 2003, p. 60), this connection could well be with horses.

Similarly, the relational model theorists (Liang et al., 2002) identify positive qualities of relationships for women. These include authenticity, the feeling of being free to be genuine in the context of the relationship, mutual engagement, perceived as a commitment, and attunement to the relationship, also, empowerment or the experience of feeling personally strengthened, encouraged, and inspired to take action including the desire to seek further connection.

For the engagement quality, I would like to add that in relating to horses you have to be in the present; the here and now is paramount. This may be why horses are so commonly used for healing in therapeutic relationships, with the emergence of equine assisted psychotherapy (EAP) linking to the existential-humanistic tradition of the Gestalt, clinical psychologist, Fritz Perls (Ivey et al., 2002) who located his therapy in the present. If you are not fully involved in the relationship with a horse a breakdown will occur. There is a well known saying, which I cannot source but it goes something like, “When you have a task to complete with a horse, if you act like you have ten minutes it will take all day, but if you act like you have all day it will take ten minutes”.

Liang et al. (2002) believes the psychological health of the individual depends on the presence of these three qualities in a relationship, thus the relational health model can be employed to conceptualize innovations in areas such as relationships from outside the family, or non-kin,

even a horse. I am aware of the critics of the relational health model that believe it reinforces the oppression of women by stressing the nurturing qualities. Like Westcott & Jordan (1997) I contend that the personal needs of women are fulfilled by the empowerment that derives from such growth fostering relationships. Relational theories are similar to the interactional personality theories where horses can play a role as substitutes for human individuals. Within the family constellation, understanding the role of an animal within a family can reveal much about the dynamics and relationships that exist in that family (Brodie, 1981; Gillig, 1993).

These ideas counter most traditional psychological theories where the ultimate developmental goal of a healthy autonomous and independent person is separation individuation. However, they share connectedness with the relational theory of healing which conceptualises an ongoing, growth-fostering connection as critical to development (Johnson, 2001). Thus the emerging theoretical framework of the relational health model will provide a foundation for the quantitative portion of this investigation and lead to the development of the questionnaire.

Chapter 3 Literature review

The emerging theoretical framework of relational health can provide a foundation for future quantitative investigations into the effectiveness of animals in maintaining human health. There are quantitative, theory driven studies, employing objective data collection and analysis to test hypotheses and verify theories. Also, there are qualitative theory derived investigations attempting to explain the phenomena. Previously the latter has suffered in the scientific community, but in the field of health psychology the epistemology and ontology bases of feminist post-modernists are influencing research (Ussher, 1999), with a critical and subjective reflexivity. According to Chamberlain (2000) if undertaken by a positive, empirically trained researcher, like myself, qualitative research may be tainted with assumptions implicit that a reality can be truly uncovered. What is important is “how the researcher relates to the research and the researched, and how that shapes the interpretation” (Chamberlain, 2000, p. 292). I will be aware of this possible source of ‘taint’ and offer a patent record of my relationship to the topic being researched, the co-participants involved in the research and how my interpretations of the data are shaped.

I will briefly describe the academic research on human-animal interactions with respect to human health benefits and then these phenomena will be explored further with specific regard to the relationships between humans and horses.

3.1 Human-animal interactions

Firstly I will describe the research showing the positive effects of human-nonhuman animal interaction, then, I shall focus on the use of animals as an adjunct in therapy and the research investigating its effectiveness.

Animals are good for people (Edney, 1992) and the interaction between humans and other animal species has been well documented. Cusack (1988) believes the human-animal bond to be an important physical and psychosocial relationship that occurs between a person or family unit and an animal. In support, Myers & Saunders (2002) state that animals display four properties of a constant interaction. These are agency (animals eat when they are hungry), affectivity (animals enjoy play), coherence (a pet dog will coordinate movements in synchrony with a child) and continuity (a relationship). Within relational well-being, actions to self, others and society are value driven and horses as partners may create positive transformative change in individuals marginalised by society, that is, children, the elderly, the ill, prisoners and women (Kellert, 2002).

In a compelling study on human health it was found that pet-owners reported less minor health problems, had higher self-esteem and took more exercise than non-pet owners (Serpell, 1991). Dog owners average higher levels of exercise than matched groups of non-owners and this has measurable health benefits (Headey & Grabka, 2003). It seems that interacting with a friendly animal decreases sympathetic nervous system arousal and acts as an anxiolytic intervention and DeMello (1999) found that stroking an animal significantly lowers a person's heart rate. Hama, Yogo & Matsuyama (1996) have replicated this autogenic relaxation effect whilst humans have touched horses and their findings also reinforce the mutual and reciprocal effect on both species. Odendaal (2000) has proposed that there is a basic physiological need of positive interaction, called 'attention egens'. This attention egens may be fulfilled by attention gained from a horse.

According to Cusack (1988) there are four types of psychosocial benefit associated with the human-nonhuman animal interaction. They are companionship, support, a focus outside self, and protection. These benefits are similar to the seven opportunities that animals afford humans identified in the Holbrook, Stephens, Day, Holbrook & Stanzar (2001) study (companionship, appreciate nature, nurturant, to parent, for inspiration and learning, to be childlike and playful, to strengthen bonds with other humans². In emotional development Triebenbacher (1998) believes pets act as transitional objects for children and in social development and Beck and Myers (1996) found pet owning children to be superior to non-owners at registering subtle nuances in expression of non-verbal communication. These children were socially more competent in a classroom and were able to make relationships with their peers easily. The presence of animals also promotes socialisation between humans as animals act as a social lubricant, facilitating conversation (Kidd & Kidd, 1987). Such studies reinforce the importance of the relational model in human-nonhuman animal interaction.

With such beneficial effects on humans it is not surprising that animals have been used as an adjunct to therapy. Animal assisted therapy (AAT) has had a long history with many anecdotal reports. It appeared in the academic literature in the 1960s (Trivedi & Perl, 1995). There followed a period of quiescence until the mid 1980s and after a search on relevant databases I noted an exponential increase from 1985-1996 compared with 1997-present. A major problem with quantitative AAT studies is one of paradigmatic inadequacy, however, their relevance to this investigation is that animals have been described as non-judgemental, as a confidant and offering unconditional love (Connor, 2001). I propose that all these qualities are necessary for a healthy relationship and can be provided by a horse.

Animals act as a bonding catalyst, with otherwise non-communicative clients (Fawcett &

Gullone, 2001) and provide a powerful, effective, interesting, and fun therapeutic alternative. They intervene in times of crisis and grief (Sable, 1995) and in this context serve as transient objects (Serpell, 2002) but have the added value as they can respond to the client's needs by offering apparent support. In 2001, Johnson employed unstructured interviews to determine the relationships with animals as a component in the healing process for child abuse survivors. The relational theory of healing provided her theoretical underpinning and she identified eleven themes within the relationship³. These themes are unconditional love and acceptance, accurate empathetic understanding, accepts self, helped me escape, get out of myself, reason to live, security, desire to nurture, feel powerful, takes in energy and help with human relationships. Johnson concludes that horses seemed particularly useful in facilitating healing. She stated that it is the relationship that heals and relationships with animals can be more healing than relationships with other humans.

This topic is gaining momentum in the US. Recently Lasher delivered two papers at different universities, "*Animal companions: Looking at the relationship*" at the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology (2003) also "*And the animals will teach you: Discovering ourselves through our relationships with animals*" at the New School Open University (2003). She explores the human-nonhuman animal bond through the perspective of relational theory in psychology. This bond includes attunement and empathy, as models of non-verbal communication among living beings. Lasher also considers how the human connections with animals provide safe, responsive settings for inner growth.

3.2 Human-horse interactions

Other US Universities have focused on the connection between humans and horses. The agricultural department at Truman University (2003) offers an interdisciplinary paper entitled "*The horse in art, science and history*". In the literature advertising this paper the importance of the pivotal role of horses in shaping human culture is described. It was also interesting to note that a woman, Elizabeth Lawrence (2002) delivered an anthropology paper at Tufts University entitled "*Horses in American society: Studies of human-horse interactions and the meaning of horses in life and culture*". Considering our long association with horses, at last the importance of horses to society is being considered a legitimate academic field; however, I believe this topic remains marginalised by most mainstream social scientists. At this point I will consider previous research that investigates the positive bond between humans and horses and more specifically between women and horses.

A literature search of the relevant databases reveals only a few studies researching the

therapeutic value of horses to humans, these are mainly quantitative and quasi experimental using correlational analysis of self-report inventories completed by small, non-homogenous samples. All, Loving & Crane (1999) in a review on hippotherapy, using horses in physical therapy, only reported one study that had measured psychosocial outcomes. Cawley, Cawley & Retter (1994) showed an increase in self-concept after a programme of horse riding for adolescents with special needs. More recently, Greenwald (2001) replicated this effect with a sample of emotionally disturbed boys and Farias-Tomaszewski, Jenkins & Keller (2001) with physically impaired adults. Scialli (2002) described the parental perceptions of the effectiveness of therapeutic horseback riding for their children with varying physical disabilities. She described a significant positive improvement in motor skills and self concept ratings. It is interesting to note that all these academic researchers are women.

In a psychoanalytic qualitative case study in 1983, Schowalter described the importance of a relationship between a twenty year old woman and a horse. He was heavily influenced by Freud and concluded that the horse served as her protector from anxieties, such as, castration, and the horse became a love object, thus reinforcing the patriarchal objectification of horses. A vacuum then appears in the academic literature until the mid 1990s when equine assisted psychotherapy (EAP) emerged. O'Connor (2002) reviews EAP and considers it a tool for emotional growth and learning through caring for a horse, the client forms a bond based on trust, respect and responsibility. Duration of sessions and client groups have been diverse, ranging from two hour empowerment workshops for women to year long programmes for urban juvenile delinquents at dude ranches.

Since 1997, Epona Equestrian Services, a collection of horse trainers and counsellors based in Tucson, Arizona, has explored the therapeutic potential of equestrian pursuits (Kohanov, 2001). The Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA, 2002) now has dedicated website www.eagala.org that exists to support this new discipline. Recently Frewin and Gardiner (2004) introduced this alternative form of therapy to New Zealand psychologists. They co-presented a paper entitled "*The new therapist: Conversations with a four thousand year old sage*". However, the introduction of new EAP programmes must be carefully monitored. Aaron Katcher, vice-president of the US Animal Therapy Association, rightly cautions about the potential risks of using such large animals and suggests comprehensive training for potential facilitators. To this end, the Equine Facilitated Mental Health Association of America (EFMHA) is liaising with other equine groups to create consistent terminology, standards and practices (Kohanov, 2001).

In 2001, Taylor (another woman) completed a masterate on equine facilitated psychotherapy.

She described it as an emerging field and calls for more academic research to understand what 'believers' already 'know' "about horses being vehicles of healing and change" (2001, p. iv). Earlier, Karol (2000) and Tyler (1994) qualitatively investigated this field of equine psychotherapy or hippopsychotherapy and discussed the relational benefits between the horse as healer and the client with psychological problems. Karol concluded that an important aspect of the healing relationship was the pre-verbal experience required by the client. Also of interest is Tyler's all women sample. Burgon (2003) undertook a case study report on the positive psychotherapeutic effects of weekly riding therapy for a group of six women in Devon, England. Her investigation gave the perspective from the view of the women themselves who reported an improved self-concept and increase in confidence as they learned to trust the horse allocated to them. I have not yet located a study that has investigated the relational health resources that horses provide on a daily basis for healthy women.

Wittgenstein (cited in Shotter, 1994) brings to our attention that it is unnoticed everyday activities that have a powerful influence on our lives. These taken for granted events constitute our lives as we react as embodied beings to those around us. These 'joint actions', according to Shotter (1994) are 'things' we just do. I posit that 'joint actions' with horses on an everyday basis enhances and maintains a woman's relational health. This research is innovative as it privileges salutogenesis above pathogenesis, that is, it investigates healthy women and will add knowledge to the discipline of health psychology.

Footnotes

2. Cusack's (1988) four psychosocial benefits and Holbrook et al.'s (2001) seven opportunities associated with the human-animal interaction provided a basis for potential prompts for the focus group discussion.

3. Johnson (2001) proposed relational components in the healing process with animals and her eleven themes also provided a basis for potential prompts for the focus group discussion.

Chapter 4 Research Design

Although I acknowledge that too much pre-reading may lead to researcher bias, the theoretical base of the relational health model has now been proposed. What follows will be a pragmatic choice of research methodology that will allow the phenomenon under investigation to be explored using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Smith (2003) states there is a significant shift in psychology to undertake qualitative enquiry in favour of objective, positivist experimental research and the British Psychological Society launches a new Section in Qualitative Methods in September 2005. This methodological transition increases the availability and legitimacy of multiple forms of qualitative research approaches.

The bricolage, discussed more fully later, offers a new form of complex multimethodological inquiry into social research. Kincheloe (2005) describes this research orientation as an interdisciplinary approach which avoids the superficial breadth of methodology embedded in traditional unidisciplinary approaches. Although the scholarly debate of interparadigm comparisons is important it would be beyond the scope of this masterate thesis. Crucial ontological and epistemological issues within the qualitative-quantitative dichotomy arise and can be addressed in postgraduate research methods. Like many postgraduate students, I was not confined by a predetermined commitment to a specific paradigm or methodology. So the possibilities of integrating both perspectives are heightened (Camic & Rhodes, 2003). This body of knowledge does not set out to solve problems in health psychology but in the tradition of the humanities it strives to deepen our understanding of aspects of everyday human life that has a salutatory effect.

Thus it was proposed to employ a research design that is flexible enough to enable me to collect and analyse both qualitative and quantitative data. Such a research methodology, using qualitative and quantitative approaches, can be located within ethnography and its choice as a methodology will be considered in the next section.

4.1 Methodology of choice: Ethnography

Firstly, I will discuss the choice of ethnography, as the broad basis for the research design from philosophical and theoretical perspectives. Then I will justify the use of ethnography as a methodology to investigate the specific research question, whilst being reflexive. Finally, I will describe the strengths and limitations of ethnography as a methodology used to elicit data in this

investigation.

Ethnographers are pragmatic. They begin with a real-life issue or problem and develop a research question, which leads to a research design and methods (Crotty, 1998). Subsequently, the chosen methodology is justified and explicitly located within both theoretical and philosophical perspectives. In doing this, the integrity of the researcher is maintained, as their assumptions are available for scrutiny by observers.

4.1.1 Philosophical and theoretical perspectives

According to Davidson & Tolich (1999) philosophical questions concerning ontology and epistemology are fundamental to all social research. In selecting a research design I had to examine my position regarding the philosophical assumptions of inquiry (Clark, 2001). In Figure 1 (on page 22) I have tried to show the possible directional relationships between such levels in research. The theories and research designs that influence ethnography can be seen in Figure 2 (on page 23).

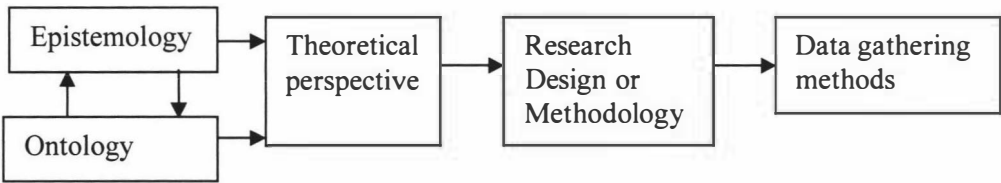


Figure 1: Possible directional relationships in research.

The ontological question asks about the form and nature of reality and constrains the answer to the epistimological question, which asks about the nature of the relationship between the would-be knower, and what can be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Within the ontology of relativism, realities are multiple, intangible constructions, socially and experientially based, local and assumed to be specific to particular groups of individuals who share systems of interpretation and meaning making. Some constructions about women’s relationship with horses will be shared among many individuals. Interpretivists prefer researchers who acknowledge their own curiosities, intuitions and instinct (Smith, 1992), as they focus on meaning and attention at the method level. I have maintained a reflexive stance to enable the reader to assess the ‘validity’ (positive talk) or ‘trustworthiness’ of my stated position.

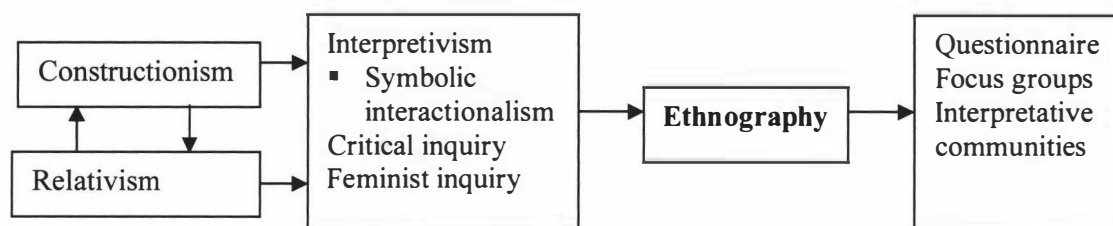


Figure 2: Position of ethnography in research.

Within the methodology of ethnography there is an interactive, contextualised, compelling approach due to joint participation in the exploration of the research question, “What are the relational health resources that horses provide for women?” Ethnography requires socially active participants to be in negotiations with others in the communal events that are the basis of a shared culture (Eder & Corsaro, 1999). I was able to relate to the participants as a woman whose life has been touched by horses. Ethnographers attempt to understand the process of social action, investigate within context or in natural settings, and are aware of multiple perspectives. The data collection and some aspects of the analysis of this research took place in a culturally appropriate setting, a domestic situation, with a group of women, around a kitchen table discussing their passion, horses.

Critical ethnography has its roots in feminist research, the construction of gender is central to this study and the making visible of a previously invisible (in terms of research) group, that is, horsewomen. Ethnography gives voice to the views of the other and provides material for criticism of the mainstream culture that has previously failed to provide adequate, grounded accounts of such a group of horsewomen. No previous study has integrated both women and horses in this way.

Richardson (2000) believes ethnography should not be constrained by the habits of somebody else's mind and is flexible enough to allow a range of methods to be used, for example, focus groups, questionnaires, and interviews. I intend to take an eclectic approach, integrating research methods from both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms into the design. I do not believe a dichotomy exists or that the data gathering techniques associated with each are mutually exclusive. Weinholtz, Kacer & Rocklin (1995) reveal how blurred and ambiguous the qualitative-quantitative differentials are in terms of assumptions of objectivity and realism. They state that rich qualitative data can salvage quantitative data that yields inconsequential or erroneous results. Similarly, I believe that forethought in research design, to incorporate judicial

collection of quantitative data during qualitative inquiry, could supplement data collection from focus groups and interpretative communities and would offer an efficient and cogent tool to support qualitative research findings. Such a tool will be the modified (Liang et al., 2002) relational health indices questionnaire (Appendix A). Multiple sources of data would be located, until saturation, to enable interpretation to develop an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Walker (1991) advocates an interdisciplinary approach with a reflexive naturalistic epistemology, and a unity with science. Academia demands psychological research to be written in a style to be accessible to the wider population (Grace, 1991), even though this and many masterate thesis are not. So, ethnographers should revel in the blurring of the qualitative-quantitative boundaries.

There is no such thing as the perfect research methodology, "particular problems demand particular solutions" (Davidson & Tolich, 1999, p.21). I must be pragmatic in terms of time and money and fit the purpose of a 100 point masterate thesis. Denzin & Lincoln (1994) regard the work of qualitative research has evolved through five phases or 'moments' and they apply the term bricoleur to any critical qualitative researcher that can identify with their final three phases. The moments are described below and then I will provide evidence that this research might be described as bricolage by Denzin & Lincoln (1994). Firstly, the traditional period of the lone ethnographer who provided objective and positivist accounts of their field experiences. They then describe the modernist phase, where cultural researchers applied grounded theory with rigorous, formalised qualitative analysis to document the experience of the other. Thirdly, in blurred genres, constructionism and postpositivism gain influence with a multiplicity of methods. In the fourth moment there is a crisis of representation with an emphasis on reflexivity, and a production of 'multi-voiced' texts. Their final moment places an emphasis on action-oriented research.

This research employs a multiplicity of methods, so I identify with Denzin & Lincoln's (1994) third and fourth moments and can be regarded as a researcher engaged in bricolage. Like Fishman (2000) I have blurred genres, the qualitative-quantitative and set competing paradigms as alternate visions of the phenomenon of healthy women and their relationship with horses. By a multi-method of data generation I hoped to add strength through diversity. However, Meetoo & Temple (2003) suggest using more than one method in research does not automatically enhance trustworthiness, but merely that the researcher has used multiple sources of data. The research question I was interested in, the questions I asked, the different types of data I collected and its subsequent analysis all emanate from a specific personal context, horses as my passion

and, hence, are value laden. This knowledge provides an integral part of the multi-voiced texts which were analysed with the help of interpretative communities. The design chosen reflects the theory involved, the research question being asked, and the people who are being asked. Each piece of research is unique, an ethnographer can be a bricoleur and does not have to rigidly adhere to an established design, but consider their strengths and limitations, and then an eclectic innovation may provide the unique research design and create a necessary methodology.

4.2 Strengths of ethnography

The strengths of researching the other include that the moral stance is taken and that ethics is intrinsic as the researcher does not deceive the informed participants. Values are considered paramount (Guba & Lincoln, 1994); they are seen as eneluctable in creating inquiry outcomes. Ethnography is microscopic and holistic, in this interpretive study I will engage in what Clifford Geertz calls 'thick description' (Eder & Corsaro, 1999) of the daily routines of horsewomen. These routines are culturally valid (positive talk) and grounded in the participants' perspective. They provide a social reality and the qualitative section of the study will be a contextual whole and not reductionist, where parts are studied in isolation.

The degree of engagement is a positive strength. By being part of the research community of horsewomen I was able to gather much more authentic data. The evidence was essential and typical, with a deliberate selection of participants. Ethnography gives voice to the views of the other and provides material for criticism of the mainstream culture that has previously failed to provide adequate, grounded accounts of the daily lives of horsewomen.

As interpretive research does not set out to test pre-stated hypotheses (Haigh, 2000) I was able to develop a negotiated plan, similar to action research. I consulted with the local Adult Riding Club to ground this research within a perspective of New Zealand horsewomen. I endeavoured to keep the research process patent and open to critical scrutiny, to improve content validity (positive talk). Collecting multiple sources of data (questionnaires, focus groups, and interpretative communities) helps ensure trustworthiness.

Scepticism over the ability of the researcher to remain objective exists for the social scientist. A strength of ethnography is that the interactive nature of the researcher participant is expounded. I cannot escape my social world in order to study it; I refuse to eliminate the researcher effect as I believe my active participation in the focus groups will elicit a richer data set. Delamont (1992) discusses the importance of reflexivity at all stages of the research process and considered it to be akin to self-consciousness. I carry out a self-history and self-inquiry

and take a self-reflective position regarding my reasons and motivations for undertaking the research. Bolam & Chamberlain (2003) describe this as 'light' reflexivity and also advocate 'dark' reflexivity, that is, to consider the ethics, power and politics that underlie practice.

Application, advocacy and activism are key strengths in ethnography and the complex political and ideological agenda can be brought into sharp focus by the self-reflexivity required by the researcher. I am passionate about horses and will be actively engaged in facilitating the multi-voice reconstruction of horsewomen. The complex role of language and discourse will alert the academic community to the multiple subjectivities of horsewomen and the role of horses in their health and well-being.

Ethnographers are not bound to the convention of objectivity; almost any procedure employed can be justified within the investigation (Smith, 1992). Ethnographers are able to change their data gathering instruments because flexibility is valued more than a rigid adherence to strict procedures. I view this, not as a lack of rigour but a key strength. I used three methods to gather data, a questionnaire, focus groups and interpretative communities. The latter assisted in the analysis of the narratives that emerged from the focus group and helped make visible the previously invisible.

4.3 Limitations of ethnography

The ethical issues of anonymity and confidentiality are raised in this research. Anonymity may be considered a non-issue in this study because focus groups immediately make it impossible to achieve. More crucial is the issue of confidentiality which may have become a dilemma and I discuss how I addressed this important issue in a later section on ethical concerns in Chapter 5.

Gaining access to the other is also an issue; the documentation of entry acceptance and nature of participation is imperative so that it can be evaluated. Punch (1994) describes the infiltration concept, considering it negatively, akin to spying. I do not have to furtively infiltrate the culture of horsewomen because I am already a member.

The insiders' perspective is highly challenging in ethnographies of children, the adult researcher is obviously different in terms of cognition, communicative maturity, power and physical size. Some of these difficulties cannot be overcome, so Eder & Corsaro (1999) advise limited peripheral participation to minimise disruption and obtrusiveness. I decided to restrict my sample to adults and relied on retrospective narratives to gain personal meaning systems over a lifespan, that is, the perspective of a girl's relationship with horses. I am fully aware and

acknowledge that such memories are reconstructed and will not be contemporary.

Limitations occur with regard to authenticity. Ethnography is fieldwork and the writing it engenders can only tell a partial story (Gabbert, 2000). The culture of horsewomen is not an object to be described but is temporal and contested by insiders as well as outsiders. Schowalter (1983) validated his work using the affirmation of Freudian theory, I believe he distorted the social reality and did little to extend the knowledge of the meaning of horses to women. As a feminist, I aim to reclaim that knowledge.

In reflexivity, issues of objectivity and detachment arise. Walshaw (1999) states that the researcher overlays what is seen and heard with their own conscious and unconscious interpretative baggage, which can lead to a complex and ambiguous set of interactions. However, through member validation the meaning may be reclaimed by the participants and analyses through an interpretative community should reduce ambiguity.

Chapter 5 Method

In this chapter I will describe and critically examine the sampling and data gathering techniques. The quality of this research is addressed from a constructionist perspective and the ethical concerns are described. Finally, the strengths and limitations of these chosen methods are explored and later in the discussion I examine my part in the research as a bricoleur.

5.1 Sampling

A group of horsewomen constituted a deliberate opportunity sample. The term horsewomen has been used throughout this thesis to refer to women that identify themselves as having relationships with horses as an important part of their lives. I use the term horsewoman loosely and definitely not with an upper case 'H' as I believe there are only a few true Horsewomen, that is, women who live and breathe horses and have exceptional relationships with horses.

This story of women has been told by a white, heterosexual, healthy, middle-aged, middle-class woman. Critically according to Gergen (2001) this feminist standpoint can also be regarded as not representative and it possesses oppressive tones. However, in recruiting members of a focus group Montell (1999) suggested a standpoint of any group of women based on their everyday lives does not have to be representative to be trustworthy and trustworthy is considered more important than representation in this research based in the epistemology of constructionism. I have omitted the stories of children so I doubt that I have avoided the oppressive overtones suggested by Gergen (2001), but this is a thesis based on the standpoint of this particular group of horsewomen.

The sample of horsewomen was recruited from the local Adult Riding Club as this was geographically practicable and provided an ease of access. As a member of the Riding Club I affiliate with the culture and in ethnographic terms it was important to recruit participants from the group to which I belonged. Participants were invited to take part in the survey by questionnaire and the first focus group. There was no conflict of interest in my dual role as 'insider researcher'. After gaining written permission from the Riding Club chairperson I was able to gain access to the sample. I contacted the membership secretary of the local Adult Riding Club and asked her to place a copy of the questionnaire (Appendix A) and a copy of my letter explaining the questionnaire (Appendix B) in the next newsletter. A total of forty seven questionnaires and accompanying information letters were posted out and twenty six replies were returned in the self addressed stamped envelope which was provided.

To recruit participants for the focus group meetings I also sent a copy of the information sheet (Appendix C) and consent form (Appendix D) inviting the women members of the Riding Club to attend a focus group discussion. Five replied to this request by returning signed consent forms and a further sample of four women was recruited using a snowballing technique to attend a second focus group meeting. They too were sent a copy of the information sheet and consent form (Appendices C and D). Subsequent to the focus group meeting these women participants were further invited to take part in a follow up meeting, the interpretative community, to assist in the analysis of themes that emerged from the other focus group.

5.2 Data gathering

According to Reker & Chamberlain (2000) the use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches can be positive and enrich our understanding of a phenomenon by confirming or contradicting interpretations. They describe three possible ways the two approaches can be linked but caution the use of positive talk, such as, biases, particularly in evaluation. Their first, joint methodology is dominant-less dominant, where one approach takes a major role and the other is merely supportive. Secondly, a two phase process deals sequentially with data gathering and analyses, their example suggests qualitative before quantitative but it could be vice versa. Finally, in mixed methodology qualitative data gathering preceded quantitative analysis of that data. Dittmann-Kohli & Westerhof (2000) used this latter combination in their investigation of life-span theories.

With regard to data gathering this investigation employed the dominant-less dominant model described above. That is narratives from discussion groups (focus groups and interpretative communities) as a dominant qualitative approach and the answers derived from a questionnaire to compose the less-dominant part. This is because on its own analysis of such quantitative data would not be appropriate to understand the complex research question concerning the relational health resources that horses provide for women. This positivist approach would hold little relevance, with its assumption that objectivity can be achieved and be value free, ignoring my cultural, historical and ideological background. At least the mainly qualitative approach proposed in this research acknowledges that objectivity is an illusion and small groups of women, focus groups, are social microcosms, the real laboratories of social representations. The information generated solely in quantitative research would be reduced and statistically analysed to create norms, which may not exist in the heterogeneous group of women that interact with horses.

So, three separate but not mutually exclusive types of data gathering techniques were used, a

questionnaire, focus groups and interpretative communities. Quantitative data was gathered using a questionnaire (Appendix A) and details of the development can be seen in Appendix E. Qualitative data was elicited from two focus groups and two interpretative communities.

5.2.1 Focus groups

I was under the misconception that focus groups would be more convenient than interviewing people on a one to one basis. I should have been warned by Wilkinson (2003) when she said at first sight they are a deceptively simple data gathering method to collect a large amount of data from an informal small group of people.

Following return of the consent forms two focus groups were arranged. A time was selected to suit as many as possible; however, due to a prior commitment one of the five could not attend the first Riding Club focus group meeting, so she attended the second, snowball focus group meeting. Also, one of these women could not attend the focus group but did later attend the interpretative community. Thus both focus groups consisted of four women participants and myself as researcher:participant. I sent them a letter confirming transport arrangements, the venue, date and time of their meeting.

I violated scientific norms by inviting research participants to my home and provided refreshments and like Gergen (2001) with her with the goal of decontextualising the research, I hosted a gathering around the kitchen table having a coffee and nibbles. Having the tape recorder was not conventional, and Sara one of the participants mentions this in her post-participation written feedback, "Well done for making us relaxed enough to forget about the tape recorder. Nice supper too!"

As the initiator of the focus group meeting, I welcomed each member as they arrived. When all were present the purpose and process of the meeting was outlined and a further contract was signed, the confidentiality agreement (Appendix F). To start the meeting and as an ice breaker, I asked an open question and invited group members to introduce themselves and their horses. I then became a facilitator. In this role I used occasional reinforcers to indicate an understanding, or sought clarification, or helped the conversation flow by following up on what had already been said. After about one hour I checked from my list of possible prompts (Appendix G) and at this point raised directly any further topics.

After most topics had been raised I thanked the participants for their time, debriefed them fully and asked them if they would like to take part in the validation exercise and a follow up

meeting, an interpretative community (by meeting or postal interchange).

The discussion within the focus group was recorded on audio-tape, the microphone placed equidistant from each member. There was minimal noise disturbance in the room and the telephone was temporarily disconnected. The audio-tape was transcribed verbatim by myself for subsequent analysis.

After transcription of the two focus group discussions I carried out the first validity member check. With a covering letter (Appendix H) the transcribed copies of each participant's part were sent to them in the post for comprehensive member checking with another contract to sign, this time the authority for the release of the tape transcript (Appendix I). Stamped, self address envelopes were included to facilitate the return of the amended transcriptions. I had 100% reply rate with none indicating they would not wish to take part in any follow up meetings.

5.2.2 Interpretative communities

Summaries of one focus group were posted to members of the other focus group and they were invited to take part in an interpretative community (Appendix J) and reply with a signed consent form (Appendix K). This chiasmic procedure can be seen in Figure 3 below.

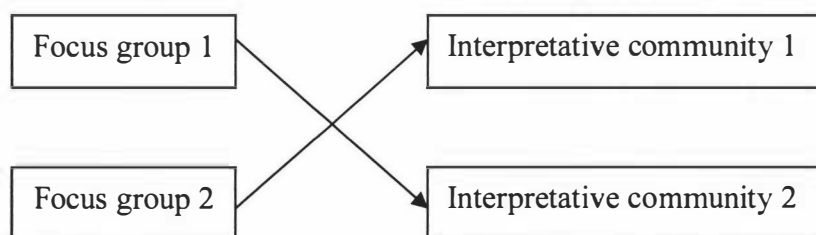


Figure 3: Qualitative data gathering: The chiasmic procedure

Practical constraints and logistical issues caused difficulties in re-creating the groups so fewer attended these later meetings. The first interpretative community consisted of three participants, including me, and the second interpretative community involved four women.

Confidentiality forms were signed (Appendix L) and the discussion within these communities was also recorded on audio-tape but I only carried out a partial transcription. I chose to

transcribe sections that added to the data or where I considered the dialogue shared in the interpretation of the narratives and emergent themes. After this transcription process I carried out the second validity member check. Similarly, a covering letter (Appendix M) with the participant's transcribed portion was sent to them in the post for member checking with another authority for the release of the tape transcript to sign (Appendix N) and return.

I offered the absent women other means of continued involvement (Appendix O) in the research process. One woman participant asked for a personal meeting at her house and another two sent written feedback to me. At this point I also asked the women participants to indicate what it was like to be a participant in this research. Their written post-participant comments appear in Appendix P and reveal their perceptions of the research and process.

5.3 Quality Criteria

McLeod (2005) states a bricoleur is flexible and responsive, technically curious and multi-competent. I have used the tools to do the job, adapting a questionnaire to gather quantitative data as well as supporting this with qualitative data from focus groups and interpretative communities. These three methods of data collection show that at least I am technically curious if not multi-competent.

Goodness of quality criteria have not been fully developed in constructionism but I have attempted to resolve some of the issues a qualitative health psychologist "should be concerned about ... trustworthiness, authenticity, saturation, meaning-in context, recurrent patterning, and so on" (Chamberlain, 2000, p. 290). The criterion of trustworthiness to parallel internal validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) was addressed by my prolonged contact with members of the focus group and persistent observation and ongoing participant debriefing. Transferability, paralleling external validity was difficult to deal with, as the sample was not necessarily representative, thus results will not be generalisable. In fact, Wolcott (1990) strongly believes that validity has no place in ethnography. Interviews by phone, personal contact or by postal interchange confirmed individual member's statements to ensure dependability (reliability). Repeatable information concerning management data can be elicited via the telephone and has been shown to be a feasible method for obtaining information from horse owners and trainers (Reeves, Salman & Smith, 1996). In an extended study (outside the parameters of a masterate thesis) at least five focus groups for each age group should be repeated and compared for internal reliability or recurrent patterning.

The fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis is the human factor but it is also

it's greatest strength (Leong & Austin, 1996). By explicitly stating my position and being patent about my interests, the potential weaknesses will be obvious to the reader. I am a healthy, female scientist, who has interacted with horses since the age of eight, and presently share my life with seven horses. The other women participants, the twenty six who replied with completed questionnaires and the nine discussion group members who volunteered are partially self-selected and may lead to a directional bias (positive talk), but given the subject matter this is probably a desirable bias.

5.4 Ethical concerns

Ethics is intrinsic to feminist inquiry and this paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994); the researcher (inquirer) is patent as deception would be detrimental to the process of revelation within the construct of trustworthiness. This study involved human participants and a successful application to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee [MUHEC] (2003) was made. The application addressed a number of ethical concerns, respect for persons, minimising harm, respect for privacy and confidentiality, avoidance of unnecessary harm, research adequacy, informed and voluntary consent, avoidance of conflict of interest, compensation of participants, respect for property rights and finally social and cultural sensitivity.

The recognition and respect of a previously marginalised group of people is the purpose of this investigation. To minimise harm I empowered participants by giving them control, in so far as the opportunity to participate in analysis, and to control their own contributions to the data. Also, I explicitly stated throughout data gathering and analysis, in writing and verbally about their right to withdraw without sanctions at any time. Ethical issues emerged in the practicality of doing research whereby the researcher may rely heavily upon local contacts. Local horsewomen were informed about the merits of the research and were drawn into an advisory rather than an adversarial role. To reduce the ethical issue of bias arising from sampling friends, I used snowballing as a technique which required co-operation of the membership secretary of the local Riding Club who was a gatekeeper.

It may not be possible to guarantee absolute confidentiality as individual participants may recognise comments from other focus group members. This is a crucial ethical dilemma to be addressed in research and to ensure the highest level of confidentiality I used pseudonyms for the participants and asked them to assume information given within the group was confidential unless explicitly stated by the speaker, reinforcing this by asking for and receiving signed confidentiality agreements.

Although aliases for the participants were used the issue of small town New Zealand may allow individuals to be identified by a specific story. I maintained the safety of the raw data, keeping the audio cassettes/paper transcripts/computer disc information in a locked cabinet. The audio tapes were destroyed in February 2005 and my supervisor will take the responsibility for archiving the remainder of the data and destroying it within 5 years of collection.

To avoid unnecessary deception I was open and patent at all times, I had no reason to deceive any participant. Trust developed that facilitated frank and real responses from the participants. In the focus groups, I cultivated a sustained, open, inclusive and permissive atmosphere in which all were free to express their views. Regarding research adequacy I had clear and achievable research goals which will advance knowledge. However, as a postgraduate masterate student it is considered a training exercise so this criterion is not deemed necessary (MUHEC, 2003).

The issue of participant consent is inextricably tied to self-determination; participants have the right to refuse to engage in the research process and the right to determine their own destiny. Aguinis & Henle (2002) suggest that if a participant does consent they also bring a commitment to the process. For vulnerable groups where consent is dubious, ethics committees provide a safeguard (Tolich, 2001). On ideological grounds any behaviour change is wrong and research itself could be considered a form of social control, where participants' experience reduced freedom during the process of data gathering. Regarding informed and voluntary consent, I considered the return of the completed questionnaire to imply consent. The investigation was explained, in full, to all participants prior to their taking part in the discussion groups. They were invited to participate on a voluntary basis only. I sought co-operation from the horsewomen and required signed informed consent from all focus group and interpretative community participants, stressing their right of withdrawal at any stage.

As compensation to participants transport reimbursements or travel arrangements were made for the participants of the focus group and interpretative communities. Refreshments were provided to reduce artificiality of the situation. Regarding respect for property rights, I sought written permission from the participants to enable me to use the information provided to submit a masterate thesis. The report on this research will be disseminated as a masterate thesis and a summary has been forwarded to all participants.

Social sensitivity to the age and culture of the participants was required. I am aware that this investigation was situated in dominant western culture but was sensitive to the attitudes and values of individual participants. I was also cognisant of the power dynamics and the power

relations that existed between myself as an academic researcher and the women participants.

Hartley (1982) believes sampling involves some degree of invasion of privacy. If you have respect, a trusting relationship should develop and increase the likelihood of valid data being collected. For the discussion groups, the University ethics committee had made a recommendation that the initial contact between myself as researcher and the participant should involve the signed contract. This in itself is an exercise of power and control (Bishop, 1996), even though my research was supposed to be about empowerment. To truly promote self-determination, consent needs to be bilaterally negotiated to ensure power sharing with ongoing negotiation throughout the data gathering process and beyond so throughout the investigation I emphasised our joint actions.

5.5 Strengths of chosen methods

Using focus groups has gained in popularity as a method for feminist research (Alice, cited in Davidson and Tolich, 1999) and can generate a great deal of data in a relatively short period of time. To enhance reliability in the quantitative approach, I attempted to be pragmatic, to replicate as much as is possible and minimise the need to develop new instruments for each research question. I modified an existing tool, the Liang et al. (2002) relational health index for a questionnaire (Appendix A). In replicating a previous study, a new set of data may be available for temporal comparison. There is too little repetition in social science. I also amalgamated key themes from four previous studies as the basis for potential prompts to be used in the focus group discussion (Appendix G).

Focus groups are relatively naturalistic, so avoid the accusation of artificiality, “they offer social contexts of meaning making” by avoiding decontextualisation and “they shift the balance of power away from the researcher toward the research participants and so avoid the charge of exploitation” (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 221). In focus groups I believe that women may feel safer than in a one-to-one interview. The focus group was conducted in a home setting and the participants were my guests. Some of the women knew each other, and this possibly added to their confidence and feeling of safety. Synergies that would not occur in one-to-one interviewing may appear in the focus groups as friends prompted each other.

The narrative metaphor of people living storied lives (Bishop & Glynn, 2000) is re-created and validity (positive speak) is enhanced as transcripts were checked by the participants. In this process there was a clear explication of meaning (Carkeek, Davies & Irwin, 1994) generating a maximum understanding. In so doing I sought to expose intersubjectivity and the collective

description of our everyday reality as horsewomen.

"Knowledge and discourse are intimately related but not isomorphic" (Morgan, 1999, p. 71) and these discussions aimed to give these horsewomen a voice: they were intended to be empowering and emancipatory for those involved. As it was voluntary and participatory in nature, hopefully it was a positive experience for the participants. I enjoy retelling stories of horses in my life and Midkiff (2001, p. 266) states that over the years she has noticed "that when women talked about horses, their faces took on a special light. Their eyes sparkled, they laughed easily, and any natural reserve they felt about talking to a stranger about deeply personal feelings evaporated".

The location of a private residence, was not threatening to participants and was not artificial so does not suffer from using a less naturalistic setting. It was empowering for the women involved as they reflected upon their own experiences with horses and were respectfully encouraged to talk about them by the other women participants.

5.6 Weaknesses of chosen methods

The sampling procedure will bring bias (positive speak) as such a small sample was recruited, however, this may be a desirable bias as stated earlier. For the focus group, the logistics of organising five busy women to be in the same place at the same time was difficult. Environmental hazards, such as background noise should be eliminated (Easton, McComish & Greenberg, 2000) and time to run the focus group takes more resources than developing a questionnaire. I arranged transport for one woman participant who could not travel easily to my rural home.

The women participants may have assessed the situation and acted accordingly. Orne (1962) describes demand characteristics, where participants guess the aim of the research. Depending on the individual woman and their relationship with me as the researcher they may have: been faithful and acted naturally; been co-operative and tried to give answers they thought I wanted to hear; been negative and hijacked proceedings; or been evaluative and apprehensive, believing I may have uncovered some unhidden truths. The women participants were subject to group dynamics and dominant individuals may have subtly imposed group consensus. There was one speaker in each focus group that dominated the talk in terms of amount of dialogue they produced.

There were practical problems with the technology; the audio equipment may have failed so

back ups were necessary. The transcribing of audiotapes required considerable effort on my part so had to be checked for transcription errors. Inaccurate punctuation or mistyped words may alter the entire meaning of the sentence (Easton et al., 2000).

Data analysis of the transcripts was more time-consuming than the analysis of the quantitative data from the questionnaire as the transcripts were given to the participants for checking and were then read and re-read during analysis. The analysis was carried out by me as the researcher and subjective interpretation should occur in interpretivist research despite allegations of bias (positive speak) by Haigh (2000). I attempted to reduce this effect by using interpretive communities, that is, a further group of horsewomen to aid in the analytical process. This process revealed a deeper understanding of the phenomenon but also generated even more data to be subsequently analysed.

With regard to the questionnaire, it is important to remember that attitudes are not a stable construct and should only be evaluated in context of the object of inquiry (Potter & Wetherall, 1987). Measuring attitudes using a questionnaire, I am aware of the cognitive, affective, and behavioural components and cognitive dissonance. Questionnaires reduce multifaceted and interdependent constructs to a few easily measurable quantitative dimensions (Gardner, 1975). So, answering the questionnaire reduces the women's experience with horses to a number that classifies individuals in nomothetic ways. The subsequent discussion groups exposed the underlying complexity of feelings and views and due to personality issues and the dynamics of the group process also affected the data.

Two further limitations arise with respect to methods employed; they are time and generalisability. Bell (1987) states ethnography is time consuming, often outside the scope of researchers undertaking a masterate thesis, which may prevent excellent investigations being undertaken. Unlike most ethnographers I already live as a horsewoman and so time spent infiltrating the sample was not required in this study. In positivism samples are representative, however, in ethnography, there are problems of generalisability and theory formation, but this is positive speak and as stated this sample of horsewomen is desirable as notions of representativeness and randomness are not priorities of qualitative research.

Having introduced and justified the method the remainder of this thesis deals with the results, their analyses, the discussion and finally the conclusion.

Chapter 6 Qualitative results and analysis

In this chapter I discuss the methods of analysis of the qualitative data generated in the focus groups and interpretative communities. The qualitative data elicited a rich set that generated sensitive themes worthy of investigation. The transcripts yielded more information about the woman participants' perception of their lives with their horses than the reductionist questionnaire and enabled a deeper level of interpretation. The analysed quantitative data from the questionnaire appears in the appendix (Appendix Q) and supported some of the emergent themes from the discussion groups, thus justifying the simultaneous collection of qualitative and quantitative data. Using the questionnaire as a framework for the subsequent analysis of the discussion groups has an advantage as the many (17) emergent themes were grouped into fewer (5) growth promoting qualities. I will now introduce the women participants in the discussion groups and then explain the process I applied to the analysis of the transcripts. The deep level of transcript analysis and interpretation appears in the subsequent five chapters.

6.1 Participation in the discussion groups

Consent forms were returned by nine women who had agreed to take part in the focus group meetings. The five members of the local Riding Club were Claire, Sara, Stella, Veronica and Rosa. I, Ruth, am also a member of the Riding Club. The other four women participants, Chris Lynne, Maria and Zoe were recruited by the snowballing technique. Table 1 (on page 38) shows the attendance at the focus group meeting and the interpretative communities.

Table 1: Attendance at discussion group meetings.

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Focus group | 1 | Claire, Sara, Veronica, Rosa and Ruth |
| | 2 | Stella, Zoe, Lynn, Maria and Ruth |
| Interpretative community | 1 | Claire, Sara and Ruth |
| | 2 | Zoe, Lynn, Chris and Ruth |

The biographical summaries below are based on the introductory information offered by the women participants. I am surmising their ages as I did not want to know their actual age because this would have identified their questionnaire response and removed their confidentiality for that part of the research project.

Claire and Sara are friends in their early thirties, active committee members of the local Riding Club. Both have partners who do not share their love of horses. Claire starting riding as soon as

she could afford to keep her own horse and she now has two and competes locally. Sara started riding properly when she was about twelve and didn't get her own horse until she was seventeen. Mostly self taught she now has a few horses and ponies and teaches children to ride.

Stella is a Riding Club member and is thirty-something with two young riding daughters and a non-horsey husband. Horses are a family tradition, her mother rode and she has been riding since she was three. She had her first pony at six. She describes her first little pony, a Welsh Mountain Pony as "*the best pony, I did everything, he was my transport for my whole childhood, from friends places, day or night, whatever*". After emigrating to New Zealand she continued with Pony Club and always found somewhere to ride when at University. She now considers her Cleveland Bay mare as her friend and her two Kaimanawa ponies as her babies. Like Lynne, she also started the Kaimanawas (introduced them to humans as riders) and her daughters now ride them and enjoy Pony Club activities. Stella is a member of the Riding Club.

Zoe and Chris, in their forties, are friends that share a love of carriage driving.

Zoe has had a passion for and has loved ponies and horses her whole life. Her earliest memories involve her grandfather putting her up on his horse; she apparently screamed when taken off. As a toddler she lived on her rocking horse and had to wait until she was twelve to get a pony of her own, which turned out to be her favourite pony. "*I've had several horses since, but nothing matches my first, he was more part of me than anything else in my family*". In 1997 Chris returned to the world of horses after raising a family. She now successfully competes at the highest level in carriage driving.

Lynne is in her late forties and loves all animals but horses are her passion. She first rode at the age of twelve years when the family lived on a farm. She describes "*two lovely years riding round the farm and going over jumps and falling off*". She had nothing to do with horses from then until 1997, when she and her non-horsey husband purchased a lifestyle block and successfully bid for two Kaimanawas from the Ohingaiti Sale. She started these two ponies herself and she now she has three horses, the last purchased for her husband to ride.

I, Ruth, have always been horse crazy, I was interested in horses from a very young age and my world rotated around them - models, books, and toys. I started riding at the age of eight, after nagging my parents for many years. Horses have been part of my life ever since, except for a period at University, but during this time I still rode when possible and attended equestrian events. Now in my late forties I share my life with seven horses and a very understanding husband who has also become interested in horses. Both of us are members of the Riding Club.

Veronica became involved with ponies when she was a child riding around the farm and helping at musters. She became involved with the Pony Club when her daughter (now twenty-six and teaching overseas) was six. In her late forties or early fifties, she is a Riding Club member, rides her daughter's horse and competes at local shows. Her previously non-horsey husband has recently shown an interest in attending shows with her.

Marie, in her late fifties, has always liked horses, as a child she lived in a large city, and used to visit and feed a palomino pony at the Zoo. She also remembers the smell of the milkman's horse and says "*if you were lucky you got to hang on the back and smell, breathe them in*". Horses provided the family glue until the late nineties when both children left home to pursue their careers and tragically her husband died suddenly. She now has four aged horses to care for.

Rosa first sat on a pony when she was three years old, she lived in England and her mother had taken her to see the pantomime Cinderella. Nothing would satisfy her but to ride the little white ponies from the pantomime. She is seen in photograph 3 (page x) which she sourced from a local newspaper. It reported her as saying "*I just kicked up my heels and ran away*", an often quoted saying in her household. Since then she has always been absolutely besotted with horses. Rosa has had horses since was twelve years old, and is now in her late sixties. She started to learn to ride properly when she was ten, and has run a small riding school in England and has owned approximately twenty-five horses. During the 1990s she began a competitive career in Riding Club Dressage and continues to volunteer her experience at equine events.

6.2 Analysis of qualitative results

In this section I provide a framework for the process of the analysis of the qualitative data, I begin with a critical overview and then I describe the actual process that I went through, examining the reasons for each action.

I have criticized the notion of objectivism and positivism and their assumptions concerning what can be known and how it can be known. Some data sources are not considered legitimate (Camic & Rhodes, 2003) and in the understanding of human experience the reliance on positivism restricts inventiveness and the nature of the question that can be asked.

The analysis of the generated data cannot be described as formalized as I felt it developed as I was actually engaged in the activity of analysis and interpretation, even to the writing up stage. Chamberlain (1999) who discusses the application of qualitative grounded theory to health research warns that emergent theories from the data should not be predetermined but develop

from it and then be integrated into theoretical accounts. In this research I attempted his method but I have to admit that pre-existing constructs may have contaminated and shaped subsequent analysis of the emergent categories. I used my knowledge, both personal and professional to inform interpretations of the data, such as, the influence of Liang et al.'s (2002) study to synthesise the seventeen emergent themes into five growth promoting qualities. However, I did later integrate literature into the existing theoretical constructs verified in the data. This is consistent with bricolage, as Kincheloe (2005) believes the analysis has multiple dimensions of multilogicality as attention is directed to synergistic webs of relationships.

If you were not present at the group discussions of this research you will not be aware of the animated gestures the women used in the telling of their stories. Shotter (2003) posits that much of the meaning associated with participation is communicated non-verbally and is a primordial unfolding which we are re-learning. When consciously aware that it would enrich the data I made an effort to note it down to highlight the energy involved in being a participant, not just listening but witnessing the story. As the audio tapes are now destroyed, no-one else can fully appreciate the paralanguage involved, the temporal characteristics of speech used by the women to enhance their stories.

6.2.1 The overview

Denzin (2004) believes there is no mechanical formula for success when interpretation is required, and the constructivist writer should present a text that stresses emergent ideas and understandings. He goes on to say that thin descriptions merely report what is said whereas 'thick descriptions' go beyond and provide context with authentic or deep, richly detailed, emotional understandings

The data collection and analysis have been highly transactional in the qualitative component of this thesis, a form of social intellectual craftsmanship (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004). Writing this thesis has been both personal and experiential. The experience included the help of the interpretative communities in intuitively and emotionally, creating, re-creating and experiencing the talk of the focus groups. We attempted to fashion meaning and interpretation out of the experience of the groups.

"The analytic process reflects the interplay of three subjectivities: that of the analyst, of the analysand, and of the analytic third" (Mills, 2005, p. 3). I, the analyst have made the interpretation from the field to the text (the analysand). You, the reader, are the analytic third

and I cannot control the inference you make from the reading of this thesis which may be beyond my imaginings as words have multiple meanings. I straddle both communities; the community of women with horses and the academic community and each has its own criteria for judging whether an interpretative statement is adequate. Such criterion of evaluation depends on a number of factors, including practical, aesthetic, moral, political and personal (Denzin, 2004).

6.2.2 The analytical process

I listened to the audio tapes twice before I personally transcribed them. This task proved to be extremely time consuming but very important as I immersed myself in the talk to familiarise myself with content and rhythm. What really emerged from this was the humour. There was much general laughter (recorded as G1 in the transcripts) at the shared stories. Also, many supportive comments like 'mmm' and agreements, such as 'yeah' that I could not identify to a particular woman, so have recorded them as anonymous utterances of support. Shotter (2004) states that gestures are important and crucial to the understanding of speech. So as I recalled other non-verbal forms of communication I noted these and included them in the transcription. An example would be Chris pointing to her head to indicate the feeling of one-ness she experienced with her horse.

To act as a reference to be able to identify a speaker during transcription, I first asked the women participants to introduce themselves. However, as I listened and re-listened to the audio tapes I found that I could identify each speaker quite easily. These few autobiographical words spoken at the beginning did break the ice and allowed those who did not know each other before the focus group to make their introduction informally, much like they may have done in a normal situation.

No qualitative text book I had read up to that point had indicated how difficult the audio tapes would be to decipher and I have normal hearing. The women all talked at once, sentences remained unfinished or are finished by others, and they repeat words, use non-words, laugh and interrupt each other. This 'crosstalk' or 'overspeak' revealed a high level of interaction between the participants as they responded to and supported each other. As I listened, I found myself typing it correctly in terms of syntax and then having to replay short sections of the tape repeatedly to check for accuracy and correct the initial typing to correspond to what was actually said. A few segments of the audio were impossible for me to transcribe despite repeated replays, even in slow motion. When I was in doubt I guessed, typed it in red and during member checking for trustworthiness I asked the participant to offer their thoughts as to the exact words.

During the comprehensive member checking, most women participants made no change to their dialogue from the focus group discussion. However, one used this power to remove all her double words, her 'um's and 'err's and corrected the syntax. Another wanted a personal visit to discuss her part in context with the comments from others. I happily spent a couple of hours with her at her home as she read her parts and I summarised the input from the other participants. Pseudonyms were agreed for themselves, family members, friends and horses. I also removed any indication of the locality in an attempt to retain anonymity, as much as can be expected in small town, New Zealand. When all these amendments had been duly made, I started the first level of the analysis, the sorting of data into thematics.

6.3 Sorting of data into themes

I carried out the complex transcription process, typing every utterance, false starts, self correction overlapping speech pauses and volume. In an attempt to reduce the workload for the later interpretative communities I decided to undertake only a partial transcription and applied the complex form of transcription where I thought it would render a dialogic interest and a more simple orthographic transcription, that is, just the words as they should have been spoken to other sections. Taking the advice of Willig (2003) I found it important to read and re-read the transcripts to experience some of the discursive effects of the text that I may have not been aware of as a witness to the speech or while listening to the audio tapes. This provided me with some of the content codes and emergent themes. I then selected statements relevant to phenomenon, compared individual statements and group statements with respect to similarities, differences and complementaries, then identified categories of description (Davies, 2000). However, I did not trust myself to list topics at this stage and as a novice I had to start indexing somewhere. I began by making coding categories as I read the focus group transcripts in chronological order, labeling themes, ideas, chunks and segments with short names in the margin. As I read on, I allocated these short names to other segments as appropriate and continued. After seven or so categories, I had to create some order and started developing specific subcategories. Then I had to re-read the transcripts to code previously missed segments, but in so doing new categories emerged and I had to repeat the process to locate examples that had been previously missed. One difficulty I had was that some utterances would be able to be placed in more than one category.

An holistic inductive form of reasoning took over as I immersed myself in the transcripts and further themes emerged. During this phase of the analysis I remained aware that these data are given to me in trust from real women with real lives; women who were sharing aspects of their

subjective, experiential life-worlds, including their emotions, desires, and moral values (Bamberg, 2003) so I have a responsibility to treat their stories with due care and attention. For the constructivist, trustworthiness is paramount. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985) there are four components of trustworthiness, they are: dependability, credibility, confirmability and transferability.

For dependability at the completion of the coding I re-read and re-classified a section of the transcript and comparing this subsequent coding with my first attempt. I found I had repeated my previous categorization, hopefully ensuring some kind of internal reliability, akin to rater reliability.

Collecting data from two focus groups, two independent sources have given some form of credibility or internal validity to the research, like concurrent validity in more quantitative studies (positive speak). For confirmability, a form of objectivity, I sent my supervisor a copy of the first focus group transcript and my completed coding. Her feedback was positive, saying the codes were sensible and reflected the data but she added that she was only able to understand the content at a superficial level and that she “was acutely aware of not being an ‘insider’ as [she] was reading” (Morgan, 2004). In the subsequent two interpretative communities we reached shared understandings that provided a more thorough ‘insider’ approach to confirmability. This completed the fourth component of trustworthiness, that is, transferability, a form of external validity.

When coding had been completed for the first focus group transcript I then repeated the procedure with the second focus group, but had to revisit the first again when more themes emerged. In total seventeen themes emerged from the focus group discussions and are listed below. The first thirteen listed were raised in both groups independently. Differences between the groups accounted for the last four themes. The first focus group of local Riding Club members had more emphasis on competition, ‘control’ and the ‘use’ of horses in recreation rather than the second focus group which orientated to their passion for their relationship with their horses.

1. Important early memories
2. Horse as a friend
3. Horse as a companion
4. Woman as nurturer
5. Horse as a counsellor
6. Connection to other humans
7. The challenge of competition
8. For physical health
9. For psychological well-being

10. Connection to nature
11. Lifestyle choice - Commitment
12. For fun
13. Physical danger
14. Grief at bereavement
15. Horse crazy teenage girls
16. 'Gender' of rider
17. The phenomenon of one-ness

In the chiasmatic process summaries of each focus group were prepared for each member of the other focus group and the women participants were invited to continue to be a part in the process of this research. Finding a mutually convenient time for these meetings proved problematic and resulted in smaller groups for the interpretative communities. When the women participants met for the interpretive community I used any points of difference as prompts to ask for more data to illustrate these themes as we constructed a shared understanding.

After transcribing the dialogue from the interpretative communities I read and re-read all the transcripts to locate extracts that reflected an emergent theme. I found extracts of dialogue required some description to link their content explicitly to the theme, which naturally led me to the second level of analysis that is, describing the data.

6.4 Describing the themes

In describing the data I first developed a data management system and opened Microsoft Word document files under the category headings and had pages set up in each with the sub-categories. I then read through and coded the electronic copies of all four transcripts and collated them under the sub-category headings. To expand on this mechanical coding for analysis, I selectively used parts of the transcript as evidence to support a theme, with illustrative quotations. However, due to the nature of unfinished sentences I cannot ensure that the selected extracts do provide evidence to support the theme.

In this logical analysis where the woman participant's ideas were revealed I was careful not to remove an extract from a context where it may have been contradicted or expanded; sometimes this meant a lengthy segment was extracted. This caused a problem; some segments had to be coded under different sub-categories. However, maintaining the longer quotations had the advantage of giving context cues to the reader to make their own interpretations. As I extricated sections of dialogue I was mentally describing them and when they appeared on a page it was a straightforward process to describe the talk and this description is offered (see Appendix R). As I started to write the descriptions, I was able to reveal the interrelation of definitions, beliefs and evaluations of the women participants. These deeper meanings and further interpretations were

due to the conversational nature of the extracts and constituted a deeper level of analysis where the connections between individuals within a group and between the two groups will be explored in the next five chapters. When choosing an extract from a transcript to illustrate a theme, I have on occasion used the convention of editing it for readability. The problem is that I may have actually edited out cues such as faltering speech that may have provided the reader with an even deeper understanding of the interactive nature of the emerging theme. I was explicitly interweaving the descriptions into the analysis of the thematics and their meanings.

6.5 Interpreting the themes

At this point I returned to the research question “What are the relational health resources that horses provide for women?” and blended the seventeen emergent themes as closely as possible into the relational health model posited by Liang et al. (2002). Table 2 (on page 46) reminds the reader of the three growth promoting qualities that relationships hold for women.

Table 2: Liang et al.’s (2002) three growth promoting qualities of relationships

| Quality [Liang et al. (2002)] | Description |
|---|---|
| Authenticity | The feeling of being free to be genuine in the context of the relationship, |
| Mutual engagement, attunement to the relationship | Perceived as a commitment, and being in here and now |
| Empowerment | The experience of feeling personally strengthened, encouraged, and inspired to take action including the desire to seek further growth-fostering connection |

In this research I have synthesised the seventeen emergent themes with the three qualities from Liang et al. (2002). I have taken the last description in Table 2 above ‘the desire to seek further growth-fostering connection’ and used this to create a fourth quality, the connection to other humans. One emergent theme could not be directly matched to the Liang et al. (2002) qualities and included the theme of connectedness. Many stories reminded us that we are part of a larger whole, nature. They related to seasonal or daily activities, being exposed to climatic elements, to the wonder and awe at experiencing the socio-sensual awareness with a large animal. Thus, a fifth growth promoting quality described by these women’s relationship with their horses was created for this research, that of a connection with nature and can be seen in Table 3 (page 47).

Table 3: Synthesising seventeen themes into five qualities

| Quality | Description | Emergent themes |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Authenticity | The feeling of being free to be genuine in the context of the relationship | 1. Important early memories 4. Woman as nurturer 5. Horse as a counsellor 12. For fun 15. Horse crazy teenage girls 16. 'Gender' of rider |
| Engagement | Perceived as a commitment, being in the here and now, and attunement to the relationship | 2. Horse as a friend 3. Horse as a companion 11. Lifestyle choice - Commitment 13. Physical danger 14. Grief at bereavement |
| Empowerment | The experience of feeling personally strengthened, encouraged, and inspired to take action | 7. The challenge of competition 8. For physical health 9. For psychological well-being |
| Connectedness: To other humans | The desire to seek further growth-fostering connection | 6. Connection to other humans |
| Connectedness: To nature | The experience of the rhythms of life on Earth The experience the connection to another living (nonhuman) being The feeling of transcendence | 10. Connection to nature 17. The phenomenon on one-ness |

Like Smith & Osborn (2003) I found the analyses expanded during the write up period and each time I interacted with the text of the transcripts I was able to identify inconsistencies and tensions which provided new insights and revealed further meanings. This had a domino effect and it was difficult to keep a focus on one line of thought as others presented and required to be made explicit. As an active participant in the actual conversation I was not fully aware of all these processes in the safe and supportive environment of the interaction as it happened live.

Drawing on insights from Bloor's (2000) conversation analysis approach I was able to focus on the group dynamics while providing an understanding of issues raised by analytical induction and logical analysis. Edwards & Potter (1992) say that talk is more than communication it is action, and the comments from one participant set up an expectation in the others. It was very interesting to witness turn taking, overlapping talk, invitations, requests, both agreement and disagreement, storytelling and co-construction of shared meanings. On occasions the interactive nature of the focus groups, the interruptions, and unfinished sentences led to some uncertainty.

A criticism of my method is that I did not allow the women participants of the interpretative communities to interact with the complete transcript from the other focus group. By presenting only a summary of topics I aimed to maintain a level of anonymity for the participants of the

focus groups. It was also important to reduce the workload, as I perceived it, for the participants who had already invested a high level of commitment to this research. In retrospect, this assumption may not have been warranted, since the women participants may have been skilled in critical appraisal and may have wanted to take part in such a deep level of analysis. However, the ethical considerations were of principle importance.

I must remind the reader that the scientific status of analysis which attempts to discern meanings that arise from the story telling of daily lived experiences of people remains debated (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The qualitative component of this thesis provides an anti-realist emphasis on multiple accounts produced by a group of women about their horses rather than seeking a single verifiable account. In narrative analysis Reissman (1993) provides a warning to remind the academic community of the five layers of interpretation implicit in any representation. The reader should be aware of them in relation to any representation of these women's experiences. Firstly, the women participants are the originators, the tellers and when they experienced a particular phenomenon with their horse, their perceptual filters encoded that experience. Then in the telling of the experience further filters and checks edit their story contingent upon the role of the teller and the relational aspects of the teller to the audience in the discussion groups. Thirdly, when transcribing the text, I may have made some interpretative decisions to alter or reduce the data. Fourthly, in the analysis as the researcher I have selected the narrative, edited and reshaped it to justify my own decisions so that the data might more closely match the coding. Then you as the reader will apply your level of interpretation depending on your expectations, affect and knowledge. This thesis tries to make sense of the experience and does not claim for objective reality and it is vulnerable because of my subjectivity. However, I have made patent the limitations of the methods and made my position explicit so the reader can make their own decision about the appropriateness of interpretations of these women's accounts.

Rarely do psychologists examine normative assumptions that underlie everyday experiences. In these focus groups and interpretative communities when telling our stories we re-member, re-author ourselves, and re-create the lived experiences which evokes emotional responses from the teller and the audience as incomplete meanings and significances of the past are altered by the present. In the following five chapters I engage in a deep level of qualitative analysis of the transcript extracts that reflect the five qualities that these women participants have reported their horses provide for them on a daily basis. They are: authenticity, engagement, empowerment, connection to other humans and connection to nature.

Chapter 7 Authenticity

Sheldon and Kasser (2001) discuss many studies related to positive motivation that have been grounded in humanistic theoretical ideas and use quantitative methodologies that show that striving for the authentic self produced enhanced well-being. In this chapter qualitative research focuses on how interacting with horses allowed these women participants to be their authentic selves. Relational analysts like Mills (2005) place individuality and authenticity within an intersubjective space and recognise the paradox. In being authentic the women participants were freely exercising choice over their circumstance in an attempt to reach a self-determined and balanced position of uniqueness, an individual identity. Authenticity is a self determining position and is radically individualistic which may be limited by a public morality. It is based on separateness, a distinction between self and non-self, and values the singularity of self as independent and autonomous. Thus an oxymoron of authenticity within the framework of the relational health model exists. The juxtaposition of authenticity being a quality of relational health (Liang et al., 2001) is justified as the relational health model considers relations with others as fundamental to health.

Authenticity, the ability to be free to be genuine in the context of the relationship is discussed in relation to women participants' and their horses. A lifespan is covered from earliest memories, through formative years to adulthood. The agreed phenomenon of horse crazy teenage girls is examined as the women participants attempt to explain why more girls than boys seemed passionate about horses. A shared understanding about gender differences and styles of riding emerged and success in various equestrian disciplines was linked to the horses enabling the rider to be free to be themselves and genuine in the relationship. In adulthood two types of horse-woman relationship promoted authenticity. Firstly in a relationship of nurturing, some women participants felt a very strong desire and voiced their need to nurture. Others undergoing trauma in their lives had turned to their horses like a counsellor, for understanding and support, feeling they could reveal their authentic selves and were free to cry, without judgement. Finally, the participants come to a shared understanding that relationships with horses permit the full range of authentic adult human emotions to occur, as they were free to experience fun and enjoyment.

7.1 *Earliest memories*

The women participants spoke about early memories to do with thinking about horses or being directly involved with horses. I have chosen to include quotes from some of the women participants; the first three grew up with horses around them so it was inevitable such connections would be made, although not necessarily maintained as will be discussed later.

Rosa: I first sat on a pony when I was three years old, that was when I lived in England and my mother took me to see Cinderella's pantomime and nothing would satisfy me but I must ride the little white ponies. So um, that's how I started, I sat on this little pony and even got into our local newspaper at the time because all the ponies that I was sitting on bolted off for home (Gl) and while I can quote the thing from the news cutting even now, but anyway, that's um, my beginning and I have always been absolutely besotted with horses (Gl)... It's lasted seventy odd, seventy years, um but, you know, it's just the companionship, I don't know, just, just always been fond of horses, not necessarily the riding part at all.

Zoe: I'd fallen in love with ponies and horses since I knew that something had four legs and had a smell ...and my grandfather had a horse and he put me on it when I was six months old and I screamed when he took me off and from that moment on I knew what my passion was. Um I lived on my rocking horse when I was a child and I had to wait 'til I was twelve until I got one of my own...nothing matches my first [pony] he was more, he was more part of me than anything else in my family

Stella: I've been riding since I was three, I think. I got my first pony when I was six. My mother rode as well and I think I followed very much in her footsteps, my history. My first little pony was a Welsh mountain called Smarty, he was the best. He was my, I did everything, I, he was my transport for my whole childhood (Gl) from friends places, day or night, whatever.

These quotes reveal the importance of horses to these women's authentic lives. Rosa is 'besotted' after her first introduction and the relationship has lasted nearly seventy years. A photograph from the local British newspaper, dated from the 1930s (Photograph 3, p. x) shows Rosa on one of the 'little white ponies', her first encounter with companions she was to have throughout her life. Zoe's love of horses from a young age reveals a connection to her grandfather and Stella felt that being with horses was a familial destiny she had to fulfil. They all tell how the passion takes over and how horses were a major presence in their young lives. Zoe 'lived' on her rocking horse and later she identifies with her first pony more than her human family, her authentic self was to be part horse. The importance of the sense of smell in this bond to evoke memories of such peak experiences has generated positive emotions in Zoe. There will be many instances in this research describing the importance of olfaction, both the horses' picking up signals from the women and vice versa. Stella's pony was a constant presence, available to transport her safely for her 'whole childhood' 'day or night'.

Authenticity can be the freedom to choose over one's circumstances. Despite the circumstances, that is, not being raised in horsey families, Marie and I chose to become passionate about horses as we became free to be ourselves. Chris then revealed as a child she dreamt of a beautiful pony and such a pony came into her life.

Marie: [as a child] I lived in the middle of a city, and I used to climb the back fence at the zoo ... and feed the palomino pony. I mean when you say that, that relationship between women, it starts right back, for girls (mmm)

Ruth: Yeah, from my earliest memories

Marie: And you've never stopped (mmm)

Ruth: I was interested in horses from a very young age, everything to do with horses, models, books, toys ... imaginary play and horses have been part of my life ever since.

Chris : She found me , I didn't find her... it was just like that little palomino pony she found me I didn't find her. But its like a little fairy story, you know, this beautiful little pony running past a girl's place and it stays there (l) (Gl)

Ruth: Dreams come true.

Marie and I, both from non-horsey families, may have been described as horse-crazy girls as we expended a great deal of time and energy to make contact with horses, even horse related paraphernalia, so that we could be free to be our authentic selves. These positive emotions kept our spirits high and later in our lives we became free to share our lives with horses and the attachment has never waned.

7.2 Horse crazy teenage girls

From my personal experience, I suggest that once horse-crazy always horse crazy. However, this is countered by friends Claire and Sara. Growing up in a small town in New Zealand they had already discussed their observations and had come to a shared understanding that girls who grew up with horses in the family lose interest as teenagers, but a horse crazy girl from a non horsey background is more likely to continue with the passion throughout their late teenage years and work hard to gain the finances to purchase their first horse independently from the family that raised them. They both actively made a choice and when free to be their authentic selves as an older teenager they fulfilled their childhood desire. They become committed to expend time, energy and money into engaging in a relationship with a horse. The payoff for them must have been perceived as worth the effort, as it continues through to their early thirties.

Ruth: But what makes horse crazy teenagers still continue into adulthood?

Rosa: I, I don't know.

Claire: They don't all do though, because there's

Rosa: No they don't, they mostly give up when they get to about seventeen or eighteen

Claire: Yes.

Sara: But when we've [Claire and I] talked about that, we've wondered whether...I don't know, you might know being more of a Pony Club mum (to Veronica), 'cos none of us, or we didn't go to Pony Club, did you go to Pony Club?

Rosa: Oh yes

Sara: Um um, we kind of started later and had to self make our own horses that were just any old nag (l) (mmm) um and if we look at the girls that we were at school with who rode. They were the one's that rode since they were six or whatever (mmm) and had - went to pony club and had the opportunities and probably had reasonable ponies bought for them.

Claire: Maybe we had worked harder.

Sara: Maybe, maybe they felt by then that they'd, they'd done it anyway

Claire: Um hum, yeah.

Sara: And going to Uni. you often can't keep it up anyway

Veronica: And they're probably not riding now

Sara: No, well a lot of them aren't, that's what I was saying.

Claire: Yeah.

Sara: Whereas us, who started later, finally got our horses when we were leaving school, 'cos we had to pay for their keep and all the rest of it

Claire: Yeah, it took us, took us all that time, because we always

Sara: To convince our parents

Claire: Ever, ever since I was little that's all, that's all I ever wanted

Sara: Yes, the same

Claire: But I couldn't do it until I had a part time job and I paid for it all myself, because I didn't come from a horsey family.

Sara: I remember being devastated a couple of time when I had this horse kind of lined up, this pony and it had been for sale and it was only so much money or something (Gl) and oh no oh I had to go off home and talk to my parents, it's like no way I was just uh

Sara seems at first to seek Veronica's view before taking a moment verbalising 'um, um' to gather her thoughts. She and Claire then develop their shared theory which is supported by some of the other women participants. Sara felt tentative at first, in respect for Veronica, having to disclose a theory that Veronica and her daughter are exceptions to, and then she used a point of similarity, that going to University is often when girls growing up with horses lose an interest. At last Veronica confirms agreement and Sara emphasises the point and finishes with a despairing 'just uh' as she reminds herself of the sad feelings and frustrations associated with acquiring her first pony.

I wonder if the Pony Club girls who cease riding were also revealing their authentic selves, not a choice but a given in their lives. Perhaps finding the time-consuming activities relating to the care of their ponies to be something of a chore, hindering their ability to pursue activities they choose to do to be themselves. Marie provides a written interpretation in her feedback "Being involved with horses is a wonderful experience and develops, especially for girls 10 -18, excellent work ethics and a sense of responsibility. It also delivers strong lessons on reality, i.e. a rider can be dedicated, motivated, talented – but, if wishing to compete, this will not always be sufficient. It teaches sportsmanship, to fail/lose with dignity and confidence". In the focus group she tells the story of her elder daughter who initially chose a working career with horses.

Marie: All she ever wanted to do was ride horses but all she ever found out really was that it wasn't just how well you rode or how keen you were or how hard you worked, it was who you knew, how much you had, and a tad little bit of luck, but mostly it came down to money and people and after mucking out horseboxes all around the world, virtually, she said she was tired of working for spoilt people (l), who just wanted her to shovel and rug and lead and hold and clean and gave it up, just like that. One day she rode, next day took everything down to the, and sold every single thing she had including her saddle, boots, the lot and won't, won't get on a horse (mmm), won't go to work with horses, she says it's like being an alcoholic in a pub (mmm). She couldn't bear it so she just

Marie trails off at the end as if she couldn't bear to face the events she had just admitted. Her daughter's career with horses was over, but she seems to hold a glimmer of a hope that she may

ride again. The positive relationship with the horses was not outweighed by the sheer hard work caring for other peoples' horses without their respect.

I raised the issue of being without horses in their lives to the women at an interpretative community meeting and Lynne seemed devastated, confirming Claire and Sara's theory that she had taken years to fulfil her lifetime ambition to have horses in her life and couldn't conceive of a life without them to be her authentic self.

Lynne: Ahhh, it would be a different life, not me. That's an awful thought. I mean it took me how many years to get a horse. It took me until I was, what am I now, about forty-four. I was forty-four before I even got a horse so um... I rode when I was um, thirteen, fourteen on the farm I lived on and then I didn't have anything to do with horses again until I got the Kaimanawas. We got them at the 97 auction at Oanighiti.

Chris: That's when I made my comeback, 97.

Lynne: It's funny how us country girls from way back come back to it, but I would hate to be without my horses now. I want another one now.

Chris could be described as one of Claire and Sara's Pony Club girls that stopped riding. She had been a horse crazy teenager that went to College and ceased contact with horses as her studies and dating, her career and family took precedence. When finally her children had become independent, she could choose again to have horses in her life, to be her authentic self and not a professional, nor a mother. This return to her authentic self with horses in her life was re-iterated by Lynne who includes Chris when she uses 'us' to imply the inevitable return to horses.

Forming and maintaining long-term relationships with a human partner, career and/or family commitments can take precedence over relationships with horses as time is finite. When the issue of dating arose it emerged that these women participants had few boyfriends during their teenage years. The relational focus for horse crazy teenage girls is horses not other humans and Rosa remained committed only to horses for her entire life. Veronica talks of her daughter (25) only having one boyfriend that she has been aware of and I revealed that boyfriends had to accept my authentic self which involved being with horses. My husband now shares my passion and this heightens my experiences. From Marie's experience horse crazy teenage girls only considered boys in the context of competition where winning was more important than dating.

Rosa: Oh, that's alright, my horse has always been my, well companions, you know (mmm), I mean because I've been so fond of horses, bond with horses that I was never interested in men, or boys or going out (Gl) I think it was just horses, horses, horses, it was just horses, horses, horses (Gl).

Veronica: And she's [my daughter's] only ever had one boyfriend and um he's still on the scene, I think.

Ruth: Then of course when there were boyfriends around they had to like horses and my husband now, rides more regularly than I do and actually competes, or competed at a higher level than I did, um so he had to get involved.

Marie: But that's what I think where girls form this (yeah), this, this strong bond with horses, as I say, most of the one's that have stuck with horses (mmm), they don't even bother about the guys that ride, except for beating them.

What emerges from this dialogue is the premise that the average number of boyfriends that horse-crazy teenage girls have before finding a long term partner is fewer than non-horsey girls. Marie reluctantly raises an issue that is often put forward to explain the phenomenon. She had rarely ridden herself but raised two horse crazy daughters and still cares for her grown up daughters' elderly horses.

Marie: Okay, um, I actually think there is something with young girls, I think it's, it's almost a sexual, sensual, sexual thing with young girls and horses, I really do, because I can always remember somebody, who is now ninety, getting on her horse for the first time, and the woman trying to teach her to move the horse, to use the seat and move the horse, for goodness sake, just pretend you are on your best boyfriend (nl) and I thought to myself, well, hey maybe that's why girls have horses

Stella: Don't need boyfriends

Marie: Don't need, yeah, it's true

Stella: That's why I got my kids on to it (Gl) because if you're horse crazy, you don't have the boyfriends

Marie: And the girls, who, who are

Lynne: I've never thought of it as sexual, sensual

Marie: No, well maybe it's not the physical, maybe I used the wrong word (yeah) but, you know.

Her reluctance to voice this stereotype is revealed in her opening with 'okay' as if she has been thinking about the issue and has given herself permission to raise it. She is not convinced and uses a pausing 'um' before continuing and then repeats a word before saying 'sexual'. The rest of the woman participants remain unusually silent as she continues and she is not interrupted or supported as she purports her reasons why girls form relationships with horses at this time in their lives. Marie struggles to find the right word 'sexual' or 'sensual' and attributes the sexual connotation to someone else in her story so as not to be identified with it herself. Her nervous laughter (nl) indicates that she feels a level of anxiety about raising the issue. Stella finally agrees with the premise that horse crazy teenagers 'don't need' and 'don't have' a relationship with a human, however, she does not go so far to support the sexual aspect of the relationship with a horse. Lynne finds difficulty dealing with the concept and is about to accept that sensuality may have been important aspect of her relationship with horses as a teenager before Marie interrupts and diffuses the situation by accepting that she may have used an inappropriate term in the focus group but leaves the issue open with 'you know'.

At this point in the analysis I tried to find some academic research to support Marie's story as to

the reasons why teenage girls ride horses as a substitution for the sexual act. She says they ‘*use the seat and move the horse... [as if]... you are on your best boyfriend*’. I did not locate any but was not surprised. Stella admits that she encouraged her daughters’ interest in horses as some way of protecting them, preferring them to be their authentic selves through puberty when their physical bodies were developing into women. This concept was supported by the women participants below, but they only discussed it in terms of third persons, not as an experience they had owned.

Claire: That’s probably a good thing for teenage girls.

Sara: That’s right (yeah)

Veronica: Yes

I explored the issue further in the interpretative community suggesting that teenage girls could be their authentic selves with horses and have a safe emotional relationship in preference to a risky relationship with a boy. Sara reminds the women participants of the surging hormonal changes their bodies are undergoing at that time and those changes of mood are accepted by the horse, whereas a boyfriend may not tolerate such extremes and terminate the relationship perhaps causing emotional angst. There was a shared understanding about a horse providing a safe alternative to an emotional relationship with a human at a time of hormonal changes. The physical, sexual or sensual aspect of the relationship was not explored further and the talk by Sara and Claire was maintained in the third person. This suggests they were not open to share details of their teenage relationships with horses. Claire suggested that some teenage girls choose to risk relationship with boys and that this was when they turned away from their horses, but Sara seems to think defection from horses happened later.

Ruth: Safe in terms of a big other thing you can hug and touch, emotional bond with another that is not going to test you, it is not going to go away if you are moody

Sara: That’s probably an important thing when girls tend to be so hormonal

Claire: But that is also a time when girls give up their ponies

Sara: That is quite often later in teenage years, but I guess with all you mood swings it is just there ... it’s not going to walk away from you and maybe it’s from the maternal, nurturing thing starts to kick in as you hit adolescence

Claire: To nurture

Claire and Sara raised two further issues. Firstly, that of the authentic self being embodied and experiencing the pubescent hormonal fluctuations. The cyclic pheromones released affect the behaviour of horses which will be discussed below. Secondly, that of the women participants desire to be their authentic selves through nurturing others will be examined later.

The women participants talked about hormonal changes and the pheromones they release when menstruating. They arrive at a shared understanding that the behaviour of some male horses is affected as they are engaged in responding in the here and now to the authentic embodied

woman in front of them.

Ruth: What I was going to say is I hadn't had geldings very much and we have one, big old grey gelding (mmm) now I notice when I'm on my period he hangs around me more (oh yeah) than when I'm not. I wondered why sometimes when I went out, he was always round me and he was not allowing the (oh) (you never)(yes) others near me. And I hadn't really cottoned until I thought, oh when (oh, okay) was it last time (yeah), when was it last time (mmm) (Gl)

Marie: If you were in a big stud yard you have to be, you watch the stallions when you've got your, you're menstruating, they'll go (mmm), they'll go for you really quickly.

Zoe: Yes, and bite

Marie: Oh, you just stay out of their way

Zoe: No, it's really dangerous

The menstruation discourse started with lay terminology, such as 'period' Marie then changes the emphasis, carefully choosing the term 'menstruating', perhaps to clinicalise the talk and remove herself from it, having previously raised the sexual/sensual theme which may not have been perceived as appropriate to her in the context of the focus group. Marie and Zoe's shared understanding is that such behaviour in a male horse can be potentially dangerous to a menstruating woman, however, I was never threatened by the change in my gelding's behaviour. Thus embodiment provides a different perspective to that of a man when in close proximity to a male horse, being in a menstruating body gives a woman a feminist consciousness "a woman is always where her body is" (Smith, 1991, p.159). The different perspectives related to authentic embodiment will later be discussed in relation to gender. Now, I will relate the women's perspective on the male:female ratio of riders at different ages and stages in competition.

7.3 'Gender' of rider

I am supported in putting forward the notion that being horse crazy is not equally represented in both genders. I perceive an unequal ratio of boys to girls, favouring girls.

Ruth: But you don't have horse crazy teenage boys (no) as much as you have (mmm) horse crazy teenage girls

Lynne: Well probably, probably because it's not a cool thing to do

Marie: I mean, what's the ratio, the amount of women or female riding compared to males (mmm). Up to the age of say, sixteen, it's probably about 70% females and then somewhere out of nowhere these guys come from, you know, from having gone through without riding and pop up into the Eventing world and things like that, don't they (mmm) they, and then you get higher up and there's (mmm) (yes) more men (more men) different

Zoe: But that might be the responsibility thing, the women knows, well, you know, I can't actually leave home (mmm), or I can't flit overseas or whatever, because I've got to raise all these children (mmm) whereas, a man, is not looking at that same responsibility, to get the kids to school, or whatever (mmm).

Ruth: At that level, it is a career, so (yeah) (yeah) he has a support network (mmm).

Lynne, who has two sons, attempts to explain this in teenager jargon as 'not a cool thing' for

boys to be seen to be doing. This is confirmed by Jones (1983) who interviewed riders in the US and found that riding was perceived as a 'girls' sport' and boys who rode were not conformists and engaged in cross gender activities. Marie's observation that this ratio is reversed in serious competition between adults was also supported by the women participants. Zoe gives the concept meaning in terms of stereotyped roles and responsibilities, returning the talk to her authentic womanhood as the carer of the children within her family.

Zoe and I are fully supported when we posit that the adult males in society have a support network to enable their chosen career, emphasising a perceived inequality in top level competition for married mothers with responsibilities. The issue is explored in the interpretative community when Sara and Claire confirmed Zoe's observation and suggest in becoming mothers the women had to change their focus, from their authentic selves to the needs of their offspring and perhaps the top level male competitors may not have families and are free to continue to be their authentic selves and choose to compete.

Sara: It's interesting the ratio of riders. I often think that, all of our Show Jumping team at the Olympics this year were all male... we only had one female in Eventing. There are so many girls riding but is the guys who

Claire: Yes, that's what we were questioning before

Sara: Although, I guess the women who have babies

Ruth: Have different responsibilities

Sara: And some of them loose their nerve afterwards

Ruth: Or like you (to Claire) were saying they are not perhaps as gutsy to go out and win or be competitive (mmm)

Sara: I think lots are, but I think some loose that after they have had children

Claire: Yes, that is what they say, women say they've got more than themselves to think about now (mmm)

Sara: Whereas, the males obviously don't see it quite that way (Gl)

Ruth: Sounds familiar in all sorts of ways

Sara: Or maybe the competitive males, (pause) how many of them are in relationships? Maybe they are not in relationships, or don't have children anyway

In the interpretative community the women participants discuss possible reasons why women do not continue with a competitive equestrian career after they have children of their own. In a risk analysis it emerges that they are not prepared to be incapacitated by a severe injury as this would prevent them fulfilling their maternal duties. The women participants supported each other as a stereotypical feminine discourse unfolded; a fun loving courageous young girl is replaced by an anxious, protective mother.

Ruth:... danger, if they injure themselves who is going to look after their children and it all came down to that, the female has to look after the children, look after the husband...

Chris: ... and we were talking about how women loose their nerve after having children, confidence and that happened with me...you just loose your confidence, I don't know why.

Lynne: I think the older we get the less we are ready to take risks as well though you don't bounce back (mmm) like when you were young (mmm). You can see the danger in things and

you are not willing to take the risk to be hurt because you know it will take ages for you to come right again, yeah, and there are so many things we have to do in our lives (mmm) that you can't take that time out to be sick or hurt or, I just find I'm not as brave as I used to be, yeah.

Zoe: I was quite a brave kid on ponies but once, once my son; my eldest son had that head injury – got to make sure everything's safe, you know, don't do that one (mmm), don't do that (l) umm

Although being brave as children they now consider they have lost their confidence, never once suggesting that their partners might have taken over child care role if such an accident had occurred. It seems the women participants who were mothers had denied aspects of their authentic selves during their child rearing years.

The mothers in this research also discussed important dilemmas they had experienced as a mother and woman with horses in her life. Two such dilemmas were raised; the first was the immediate role conflict as a competitor and mother and the second was related to allowing a child to risk potential harm. Zoe decided to put motherhood before her competitive life and Marie feels guilty for not protecting her daughter from injury.

Zoe: I don't actually do competing very often because I've got five kiddies, they're stepped out (indicates heights) and so I've tried shows and I'm in the ring and they're calling out from the side line, can we open these chips (Gl) and things like that and it's just too much so I do the pleasure (l) (mmm).

Stella: I think I'm in the reverse actually, I've got the children who are interested and in, it's it's very minor, (mmm) I mean, it may grow but in, very minor way to the shows and I did once try to take my horse as well and it was just a disaster (l) so it's easier just to ride for pleasure.

Ruth: So you're the groom

Stella: I'm the groom, but I enjoy, I, I love it. I love getting them ready

During one of the interpretative communities, Sara raised a further example of simultaneous role conflict as a mother and a competitor but this was not pursued. In the previous extract, Zoe is interrupted by Stella who indicates a difference between them, but supports Zoe as they both continue to participate in equestrian activities but in a non-competitive manner, for 'pleasure'. The difference is that Stella is able to give her daughters her attention as she engages with their ponies. Again notice the number of supportive 'mmm's that appear in the above extract allowing these women to feel safe in their disclosure. This supportive and empathetic environment is also extended to Marie below as she describes a bad fall her daughter had in competition.

Marie: Yeah, you're out, you're listening. As mother's, what happens, how do you think you are going to feel, because it may not have happened yet, when your child is seriously hurt by a horse (ah, negative, yeah), which mine have been.

Zoe: Mine too.

Marie: ... So, somewhere along the line the bond with your horses actually, uh, it intersects with the bond with the children. Yeah, it's that feeling when you're watching your kid that you love and you're watching this lovely interaction (mmm) between your kid and their pony or horse (mmm) and their moving (yeah) and moving and then something happens, whatever, and there's a fall and you start wondering over and you suddenly realise, you know, not moving, and then

you see the St. John's ambulance (ooo) run into the middle, and then you think, you know, of course you've got another one in the other ring (Gl) and then you get through all that and they send for a stretcher, and by then you are really panicking, you know, and you're kids still not moving (l) and back then we, she couldn't feel her legs at all because she'd come out at the end of, of the reins, because this was a pony that put a nasty stop in and hit the cup that was left out right across the base of the spine (ooooo) and um we put her on a board on the back of a ute and drove her (l) to hospital. She couldn't feel her legs for three days, but she got out there the minute she was right, she was back out there with that horse (mmm)

In the telling of this story Marie starts in the third person, almost as if it was a generic story which in the telling she narrows down to one specific incident. It was as if she had experienced the sudden realisation that her daughters have been injured on many occasions. She uses 'we' and immediately stops, the 'we' refers to her and her deceased husband as he was with her 'back then'. Later she allows the 'we' to be part of the story as they both took their injured daughter to seek medical attention, despite another daughter competing in a nearby ring. The point at the end shows that despite such awful injuries her daughter continued to interact with the horse, even when the relationship was tested by the injury sustained. The supportive atmosphere generated in the group allowed Zoe to tell the other women participants about her son's horrific equine related accident below. Unlike Marie she situates herself actively within the dialogue.

Zoe: I was put at terrible test when my first child was eighteen months old and we were in a big hurry, we had to leave the house to go to some silly thing and I thought I'm not leaving the house 'til I've got the fire set, you know, so I took the bucket out into the paddock to get kindling and I left the gate open and my toddler followed me and I didn't know, and then I heard the horses (ooo) you just know that noise of, they make a, a giggling noise, don't they (they do) and all shaking around and ohh shoot, I turned around and there was my boy in the air and he had been (mmm) flung up and then the horse turned around and barrelled him and got him in the face (ohh god) yeah, and, he landed on the pile of rocks we'd just collected the day before for the rock garden (oh dear) and they were so sharp and just smashed his whole face up and he was unconscious. He would have died if I hadn't cleared all the bones and all the mess out, you know (mmm), he was so far, so unconscious and I picked him up and screamed, because my husband was just getting to go to the car ... I just sat in the back seat with him, and he sucked his thumb and there was just this hole where he put his thumb and he could not have any pain killer for six hours 'cos he'd just eaten and it was a head injury so they don't quite often give pain relief, whatever. Anyway I was quite sure we had to get rid of that horse, that was my husband's horse it wasn't my one, because it was a one man horse. But after going through that for a week or so, you know, in intensive care (ohh) it was not the horses fault. What he'd done, he had, must have whacked it on the nose and the horse had got a fright (mmm). Yeah, my original thoughts were we have to get rid of that horse.

Zoe had used 'shoot' as an expletive in the story and Marie was concerned that Zoe might have shot the horse because of the incident. She raises a pertinent question that is not answered.

Marie: ...I've known people, as I say, to actually have their horses shot, and does that mean just care less about the horses than we did, or do they care more about their children than we do?

Despite hearing these two stories Stella is still prepared to allow her daughter to compete as she had done, concluding that a rider could not make a horse do something it didn't want to do.

Stella: No, I mean it's a risk that they're prepared to take (mmm) and it was a risk I always took. I mean, you are on a big powerful animal (mmm) and you know, I think that's part of the thing with horses, is they are so much more powerful than us but they let us (mmm) you know (yes), if he, they didn't want to do (mmm) what we wanted to do they could didn't have to but they want to, they want to.

With regard to riding horses, the authentic embodied self exhibits feminine, masculine or androgynous traits in a relationship with a horse and it is these that may influence the style of riding and choice of equestrian pursuit. What follows is a shared understanding and construction of a feminine and a masculine discourse related to riding or driving horses. Stella and Marie were supported by the women participants as they offered a discourse about feminine traits influencing the trusting relationship. It emphasised the subtle physical signals of giving rather than taking, that are required to influence and direct the movement of a powerful animal.

Stella: And some horses just love their lady riders and they'll do anything (mmm) they want them to, sort of thing

Marie: Yeah (mmm) and so, I, I think that, I, I think that the relationship of a horse, horses and women (I) probably particularly, the women that ride them, not like the one's, like me, that just feed them and muck out, but, I, I think it is something absolutely special

Stella: And some of those Olympic women riders, they're tiny

Marie: Yeah

Stella: I mean, you just think, how on earth can that horse feel your seat bones, at all, like how, how (yeah), you know, you're four, four foot nothing and weigh probably six stone (mmm) and they're on these monstrous great Warmbloods (mmm) doing the most (yes) amazing things (yeah)

Zoe: Has any one of you driven?

Marie: I've driven Clydesdales.

Zoe: Because, you don't have legs, you don't have legs, you only have words (mmm) and you have (demonstrates holding reins), giving and just squeeze the rein all the time.

Ruth: Interesting what you say was giving, not taking

Zoe: Yeah

Ruth: You give, not take

Zoe: Yeah, you give (mmm) to the outer if you want to (mmm) yeah, because that's all you've got.

Claire suggests a masculine discourse related to riding may be due to a level of bravery and courage that allows them to take risks. She assumes males and females have different attitudes to risk which is crucial to the success of males. However, this is countered by Sara, and finally Claire agrees that some woman may exhibit risk taking behaviour, citing examples of the older women who hunt with them.

Claire: A male has got a lot more guts to go out there [cross country], I'd say a male would ride a lot harder, go direct routes and take more risks than what a women would

Sara: There are some gutsy woman out there

Claire: Yeah, there are.

Sara: There are a few old ladies when we go hunting

Claire: That's what we couldn't get over, these really old women riding these big thoroughbreds, racing along ... how do these old ladies hang on (Gl) and actually follow. But

you don't see them out competing, women that age on horses.

When discussing top level competitors in equestrian sports the women participants duly noted that at least both sexes competed together, a rare phenomenon in sport and confirmed by Brown (2003) who states that horseback riding is the one sport in which men and women compete on an equal basis. Lynne and Marie countered my question about women having better relationships with their horses and agreed that the relationship men and women had in riding their horses was different. A shared understanding emerged confirming that masculine and feminine traits influence the horse in different ways. Marie compares the physical, controlling relationship of the male rider with her daughter's non-physical relationship.

Ruth: Equality, what other sports do men and women compete on equal terms?

Sara: Yeah, I often think that

Marie: And you know, you watch out top eventer, with his legs right down, almost (mmm) under the belly (mmm) giving the horses all the signals, well, my daughter's legs always stuck out this way (demonstrates legs out horizontally) from the top of the horse, because she is short (l) and 17.2hh horse and I think, um I think that's why women develop perhaps, I think they develop a better empathy, a better rapport with horses.

Ruth: Do women have a better relationship with horses than men, because it is one of the few Olympic sports where women and men compete on equal terms? (mmm)

Lynne: I wouldn't say better, I'd say different.

Marie: Different, I definitely say women have better hands, they treat the horse, um, I mean I've seen kids, you know, I think women are actually kinder um, more sympathetic, maybe, it's that, we come back to this women thing, empathy, you know, that they feel more than the guys tend to use a lot of leg maybe (mmm), a lot of um, lot more, sort of, sheer force, perhaps and strength (mmm), whereas women, because you're lighter and you don't have that strength you have to have to has this rapport, you have to establish something with the horse.

Female and male riders are being their authentic selves during competition as the intensity of the moment prevents the emergence of a false self. In the shared understanding between the women participants the dominant feminine trait related to riding was that of an already established relationship, being in an equal partnership and in harmony with the horse, asking the horse to move with you. In contrast when describing the masculine traits, the women participants focussed on the physical strength and brute force used to coerce the horse into complying. Kidd, Kelley & Kidd (1984) reinforce these dominant ideologies with their self report of rider characteristics. Male riders chose aggression and dominance as characteristics and female riders thought themselves to be less aggressive and easy going.

This discourse on gender traits led to the authentic self in terms of sexual orientation, and in this case how it impacts upon riding styles and the type of equestrian sport pursued. The question I posed is awkwardly worded but is correctly inferred as 'good male riders are homosexual' by the women participants and elicits much dialogue. A shared understanding emerges where the women participants create an explanation for the success of a few male international Event

riders, allowing feminine traits to emerge in forging a relationship with a horse and having a gentle approach. This is contrasted by the stereotypical heterosexual male Show Jumper, exhibiting his male position of power and dominance and Marie suggests they pose a sexual risk to young females.

Ruth: Aren't the good guys that ride not heterosexual?

Marie: Quite often

Lynne: Some of them (mmm)

Marie: Eventing, Eventing was particularly, not so much at, I find it funny, if you look at this across the board (mmm) with them, with the guys

Lynne: Yeah, I've never thought of that, yeah

Marie: You're looking Show Jumping guys tend to be very, very masculine, in fact, you know, you would be, you wouldn't let your daughter out with them, if you had (l), if you had a choice. Eventing on the other hand and Dressage riders are quite often bi- or either homosexual, aren't they?

Ruth: Mmm, in my experience

Marie: Um, yeah, um

Stella: Because they have to be a lot more precise, personality wise as well

Lynne: Maybe, maybe it is (yeah)

Ruth: And it's the feminine and the empathy and kindness as well (yeah)

Stella: The gentle touch (yeah) where Show Jumping can be a lot of just, you know

Marie: Well, what I don't know my is

Stella: Brute force

Ruth: Brute force and you've got to have a relationship for Eventing (yeah) and Dressage. You've got to feel (Gl) and you can't teach feel (yeah). And when you've got a, a good Dressage horse, you can actually feel that power from behind, you can feel what you are doing.

Marie: Working under you, and yeah. And that's why I reckon that the women, that's why they, the women jockeys, for instance, now they are racing successfully, you know, on equal terms now and they're, they're just as good (mmm) and they're not nearly as strong (mmm) but um, they, they have and you can look and see they've got kinder hands. I think, (mmm), you know. I don't know why, but maybe it's the woman thing again.

This discourse of differential gender traits is continued and affirmed in the interpretative community. The discourse of hegemonic masculinities by the women participants renders homosexual men as feminised males and reinforces Johnson's (2005) claim that heterosexual ideologies do just that. They believe that contexts might provide a social location where such cultural domination can be safely challenged and resisted. The recreation of horse-riding may provide a leisure context that homosexual men might re-create their authentic selves. A shared understanding emerges that both feminine and masculine traits are combined in the Event rider who requires the feminine rapport with the horse to complete the dressage phase and the bravery related to masculinity to compete at speed across country and in the final show jumping phase.

Claire: Dressage is much more of a feminine thing, there is no doubt about it ... Men are more into going fast and jumping than there are doing Dressage

Sara: Oh, there are still plenty of guys, especially the Europeans though, in the Dressage, but we don't see many here

Claire: It's interesting that you know I can understand Dressage being more feminine but Eventing, screaming around a cross country ... I can see why men would be more into that,

yeah, that's quite interesting

Sara: Show jumping is more of an instant thing; I don't know how that relates to masculinity or not, but it's more of (Gl) (l) instant thing, where it is done straight away, whereas Eventing you've got all those three phases to get through ... and a lot of different things to focus on ... males tend to be of the one focus or one thing at a time, not the multitasking but getting results straight away.

Sara is reluctant to be included in this emerging discourse and at first provides exceptions, and then she traps herself into the paradigm with the comment that Show Jumping provides instant gratification, naively adding she cannot think why this may be linked to masculinity and the rest of the women chuckle in a knowing way. She joins the laughter but continues to make her point about gender differences related to multitasking. Claire cites a well known local homosexual as an example to Sara. Still not fully accepting the premise Sara provides examples of Natural Horsemen that she thinks are heterosexual and have empathetic relationships with horses.

Claire: He was a very good rider ... and he got a lot out of his horses

Sara: If the males who do dressage are more likely to be homosexual then wouldn't that relate also to men who are into the Natural Horsemanship side of breaking in, just following that through, thinking of the kindness and softness, rather than the brutal breaking in that used to happen. I'm thinking the people that I know involved in that wouldn't qualify with that

Claire: Not homosexual, no

Sara: I was thinking it is a similar kind of relationship with the horse

Sara was reluctant to use the term homosexual but would rather choose to say 'wouldn't qualify for that' and Claire has to verbalise 'homosexual' while agreeing with her that these Natural Horsemen are probably not homosexual. Across the US the emergence of the Natural Horsemen has become a counter movement against the traditional cowboy techniques of mounting and riding a horse for the first time. The Natural Horsemen employ a gentler, feminine approach to 'start' or 'gentle' a horse in contrast to the dominating, masculine techniques of 'breaking' a horse for saddle using ropes and whips until the horse submits in fear. The words used are also different and confirm a paradigm shift in this activity, from 'breaking' to 'gentling'. This shift allows the authentic man to safely reveal feminine traits and not be considered homosexual. Returning to the embodied women participants, the powerful feeling due to their fecundity follows.

7.4 Woman as nurturer

Stetson's (1998) thesis provides anecdotal evidence from daily lived experiences that intimate relationships with an animal in terms of nurturing and caring can have a positive effect on perceived health. These women participants spoke of needing to care for others. It seems that their authentic self depended on others to depend on them. The excerpts below were chosen to show a difference in perspective between a group of woman without children and a group with children. The childless woman participants in the discussion below consider their horses to be

their surrogate children requiring care. Even though Rosa quickly supports me at first, she later retracts by saying she 'doesn't know' if it applies in her case and then reluctantly 'supposes so'. However, as the shared understanding about the ease of just leaving horses in a paddock compared to the constant attention required for a human baby, is emerging between the others, she tries to be part of the discussion and goes on to recount a funny story about a mother who actually left her young baby in a safe, confined area to go for a ride.

Ruth: Something I haven't had is children and a lot of people have said to me oh you don't have to have children, your nurturing your horses

Rosa: Yes

Ruth: They would say there would be my child substitute (mmm) (Gl)

Sara: That's my answer when people ask when we're having kids (Gl) at the moment

Rosa: I don't know I just

Ruth: It's all that nurturing went on horses (Gl)

Rosa: Oh, I suppose so

Claire: Mum's had enough of her cat grandchildren and her dog (Gl) grandchildren (yes) and she wants a normal (Gl) grandchild

Sara: She want humans

Claire: Oh, sort of, yeah (yeah)

Sara: Yeah, it is like that though, you've got to, .. similar things, you've got to care for them (yes), you've got to make sure they're fed and watered and clothed and (mmm) not sick (yes) and that sort of thing, but the bonuses are that you can just leave them out in the paddock (YES, yes) I say that to people too (I) when they talk about children

Rosa: That's a funny thing you saying that

Sara: I say well I've got all the nurturing bit (mmm) but when I'm sick of them or when I've done whatever and I want to be by myself (Gl) they're quite happy in the paddock (Yes, yes) all by themselves

Claire: You can put the dog in the kennel, leave the horse in the paddock and go out on the town (yeah) and no-one is going to ring social welfare

Sara: And you don't have to look after them every minute and yeah (I) (Gl)

Rosa: Oh, that's a funny thing because

Sara: Leave them on their own for twelve hours on end

Claire: Yeah

This desire to nurture expresses the authenticity of the women participants. Nurturers put the needs of others above themselves. As a childless woman (by choice) I voiced this and was fully supported. The general laughter may indicate that the women participants are remembering such incidents in their lives, that is, ensuring their horse was comfortable before they sought such comfort for themselves.

Ruth: They always come first, don't they? (they do, yes) (yeah). Because even when I used (yes) to come back from a show and be shattered (yeah) driving for hours (mmm) (Gl) and you'd get back and it's dark and you get the horse away and you think, what can I do, change, put another rug on (Gl) (yes) make sure she's got food and water (yeah) (yes) and then you go in (mmm) and you collapse.

This discourse on nurturing was light hearted and there were many occasions for laughter amongst the child-less women participants in the first focus group. However, in the second

focus group the woman participants who were mothers were a little more serious. They included the horses as part of the family, like children in need of nurturing. Stella even used the term 'babies' to describe her daughters' Kaimanawa ponies. It was poignant to note that Lynne (in her late forties) considers that because she had adopted children she still has a strong desire to nurture. It is as if adopting two boys, now grown up, had not satisfied her authentic self in terms of nurturing. This may be why there is no associated laughter. It would not be considered appropriate in the light of Lynne's disclosure.

Stella: I've actually got a lovely Cleveland, she's my friend and my Kaimanawas are my babies

Lynne: That's true for me to certain point though, because my children are adopted (mmm), so I still have that um wanting to nurture (mmm) feeling in me.

Marie: With horses?

Lynne: Yes, yeah, yeah. Anything that's, anything that's young or a baby (mmm), I just go dotty over (mmm). But animals

Marie: Yeah, yeah.

Lynne: I've still got that nurture feeling, need.

Stella and Lynne had chosen to acquire Kaimanawa horses, feral horses that live on the slopes of Ruapehu, a mountain in North Island, New Zealand. The Department of Conservation has decreed that they be mustered and the herd culled or put through a sale ring to control numbers, as too many may destroy a native plant that is in danger of extinction. In the ultimate rescuer discourse below, Marie interprets that Stella and Lynne have taken the role of rescuer for the individual horse and having saved it from likely slaughter now have a responsibility for its life.

Marie: Chose Kaimanawas because of this, women,

Stella: Nurturing

Marie: Women thing.

Lynne: Yeah, it was, it was because of, of the mustering, the way they (ahhh) handled and dealt, dealt with it all

Marie: So what, what prompts the, prompted the two of you (to Stella and Lynne) to actually to take on Kaimanawas who, okay (Gl) was it the fact that (cheap) they were going to slaughter, oh yeah, they were cuter

Stella: No, they were off to the knackers.

Marie: No, but was it the (yes), was it the fact that they were going to be slaughtered

Lynne: Yes, I wanted to give them a home

Marie: And you wanted to give them a chance.

Lynne: Yes, I wanted to get at least two, yeah, a home, yeah

Marie: So, there comes your nurturing thing again (mmm) and, and the saving and those sort of things.

It was interesting that Marie was quizzing them about their choice of Kaimanawas as she had earlier discussed the reason she still has her horses was the need to be needed and that they were her purpose for getting up and out every day after her husband had died. Horses provide the women participants with the ability to experience different roles, as a dependent to nurture and as a protector from potential slaughter. Lynne, the mother of adopted boys and a grandmother

describes the satisfaction felt when merely feeding her horse.

Lynne: I love making up my bowl of food for my bay gelding. I just love the enjoyment he gets out of eating it (Gl). You know how cats go (demonstrates kneading) like this, well he goes like this (kneading) with his front feet and his tongue comes out and he tips the whole lot out of the bowl all over the ground (Gl), every time. It doesn't matter whether you put it in the thing over the gate or in the bowl on the ground he just tips it up. But its like ahhh this is just ahh.

Ruth: Trance like

Lynne: Yes he does, its amazing I just love going out and giving it to him every night, I just can't wait, is it four o'clock yet (l)

Chris: It's interesting you say that because this little young one, he does this (pawing action)

Lynne: Does he?

Chris: Yes, I keep saying this to my friend; it's like a kitten, (yeah, yeah) when it drinks milk.

Chris validates Lynne's observation and supports it with her experiences, both sharing the enjoyment and pleasure their horses derive from eating. Further moments of pleasure are discussed later in the section on the fun and enjoyment that horses can provide for us. However, the antithesis of nurturing these animals is the violent acts by others toward horses. For these women participants, although they had witnessed such horrendous behaviour their authentic selves were in denial that people could brutalise horses.

Marie: that big one that we've got (mmm) he'd had two homes and he'd come from a fairly ... forceful New Zealand representative rider (l) um, who was not known for being nice and he decided that this thing was too unreliable, which he was, he wasn't consistent, he was probably really scopey, but not consistent and the, my daughter bought him as a hunt, he was being sold as a hunter, and she bought him and took him back in the ring, and the first show we went to she was cantering round and there was one corner he would not canter into and this guy was standing there watching (ahh) (ohh) and the horse would just

Ruth: Remembered

The women participants showed no understanding of how brutal behaviour could be administered to a horse or how parents of competing children could put their children under intense pressure to succeed. Sara is supported by others who have witnessed 'pushy parents' giving a third hand account of parents who had not rewarded their child as other parents had. They had not allowed their child to participate in a fun activity with other children after an intense focused training session. Marie reports that the behaviour is widespread, witnessing it first hand, even from her initiation as a mother of competing daughters.

Sara: We see that pressure to, just from on the sidelines at Pony Club (yeah) (mmm)... one family I heard of ... at the end of instruction if they were going for a bit of a ride through the trees, 'oh no, you can't go and do that' ... they weren't allowed to the fun things (l)

Marie: Yes, ...everywhere, you know, ... and the first show I ever went to a pony came tearing up to the barrels and stopped and came off, landed across the barrel and the parents rushed up and I thought that's nice and they just threw the kid back on the horse and said, whacked the horse and said don't let him do that again (wo'a)

Ruth: Poor child

In Marie's story she leads the listener to believe, as she did at the time, that the parents' intention was to offer support for their possibly injured child after the fall. She was as surprised as the audience was these parents showed no sympathy and forced the pair to continue. These children cannot experience the joy of playing with their friends and horses and express their authentic child like qualities. The parents have forced a more mature serious and working relationship with horses on these children.

Regarding the relational approach Lasher (1998) stated that human-animal relationships provide safe and responsive situations for mutual inner growth. This thesis confirms that a relationship with a horse provides growth for the women participants throughout their lifespan from young girls, through teenage years and onto nurturing women. In a later section I will discuss how these women participants are given permission to be childlike and playful and safely express their authentic selves in their relationship with their horses but first I will describe another role in the relationship that these women participants feel that their horses provide for their authentic self, that of a counsellor.

7.5 Horse as a counsellor

As discussed earlier horses in the role of dependant have enabled these women participants to be free to be nurturers. This support is mutual and for some their horses can provide a nurturing role for the women when they are experiencing trauma in their lives. Their horses are called upon for emotional support in times of need as in the case of this cancer sufferer.

Marie: I know a friend of mine who had, who had cancer and when things really got bad she used to go out in the paddock and bury her head in the horse's neck (mmm) and cry (l) and clutch and he used to go ahaaa, as they do. (l) But just let her do it (mmm). That's, I think they're amazing.

Marie reports her friend's horse just accepted her in the moment, giving her a connection and allowing her to be authentic, to be free to be herself. The exhalation sound 'ahaaa' shows that the horse is accepting her for herself; there is no emotional incongruency in what she is presenting to the horse. Exhaling is what prey animals do when they greet each other, and I have taken it to mean 'I come in peace, my peace I give you', showing complete acceptance, as if the horse seemed to know the women needed something living to touch and hold onto, to connect with at that time.

Marie and I come to a shared understanding that her horses provided her with constant support in a time of trauma. During a time of bereavement Marie is given a purpose outside herself, the feeling of being valued and needed, and to nurture. The example that follows shows their

steadiness for Marie, a widow overcoming grief. She cares for her grown up children's elderly horses. They keep her focused on others and remind her that she has a worth to them. They were her reason for being, ensuring she continued with normal daily chores but allowing her to cry openly in her grief. Something her authentic self needed to do to be free to be herself at that moment.

Marie: Interesting, I don't, I don't think people who don't have horses don't understand people who do (mmm) because

Lynne: No, I don't either

Marie: They think you are mad (mmm). If I had to hear another person say to me shoot those dam horses (mmm). Get rid of those horses (mmm). Have a life, but that is my life (mmm). If I hadn't had those horses when my husband died, I think I would have stayed in bed 'til I'd just mummified (mmm).

Ruth: They get you out of yourself, don't they (yes).

Marie: I had to get up, I'd go over, I would muck out the stables, I'd cry the whole time and um
Ruth: A little nudge from them would just

Marie: A nudge from them ... yeah, yeah (mmm), so if I hadn't had them, I don't know that I'd still even, ... because, I was at that stage where, you know, what's the point of life and all the rest of it, and um, no if I hadn't had the horses I wouldn't still be going.

Ruth: Their steadiness and their just being there, and

Marie: And them needing me (l) (yes), you know (yes, yes).

Ruth: That nurturing, that nurturing bit.

Marie: It is, it is, it's that silly nurturing, giving, yeah um

Marie needed to give of herself to remain genuine. Within a short time frame Marie's husband had died and both grown up daughters had left home. She felt alone, no human was left to nurture and the horses provided the constant dependants she needed. This section of dialogue reveals how very important horses are to the life of some women and Yorke & Adams (2003) are currently researching the role of horses to women experiencing trauma in their lives. For some like Marie it was their reason to live and provided a space and time when she could openly weep, it was safe to expose her authentic self and have a physical contact with a living being as her horses sought to touch her and accept her in the moment. I do not think horses have an ulterior motive for seeking such proximity, only to acknowledge that the person has feelings that they are releasing and owning.

Interacting with horses allowed these women to feel free to be genuine in the context of the relationship, they were allowed to have conversations which may be considered one-sided to non-horsey people, they are listened to, authenticated; their daily problems are voiced to another that accepts unconditionally. In the relationship the horse acts as emotional healer, they are empathetic listeners and seem to have the capacity to experience the feelings of the woman.

In the dialogue below the horse is anthropomorphised and is referred to as 'someone'. Also the supportive way these woman talk with each other is revealed again as Sara uses comments like

'yep', and Rosa, 'me to'. The latter part indicates that these women would sometimes prefer to remain connected with their horses than return to the company of their human family. I know I have often used the needs of my horses to excuse myself and have some time-out from family gatherings, perhaps time to be my genuine self, perhaps the demands of the horses I could satisfy; I could be emotionally congruent with them, my authentic self. This implies I present a false self to my relatives? I really do not know the answer, just to say there is a calm serenity, a peacefulness being with horses at the end of the day and just doing nothing. Kohanov (2001) calls this 'wu wei' a central tenet from Taoist philosophy.

Veronica: Peaceful and you're on your own, and it's

Sara: Yep, yep

Ruth: So what do you think about then, when you're doing that, you said mentally

Veronica: Oh all sorts of things, I mainly talk to the horse (l)

Ruth: Yeah

Rosa: Me too (l), I do, it's someone to talk to

Sara: It's often the kind of time I think when things just go through your head (mmm) You know, like when you talk some things go in one ear and out the other. Um, I find that sometimes you're not thinking about a specific thing, but your head's just kind of empty enough just for things, I wonder about this, and ohh this and you just kind of flit and things can just pass through your head because you're not (mmm) busy (mmm) being focused on other things.

Ruth: Is it time for yourself as well? (mmm)

Sara: Yeah (mmm)

Rosa: So what you would call quality time, you know (mmm) .

Sara: Then you can be sneaky and take longer (Gl). If you don't feel like going back inside yet, you know.

A paradox emerges from this dialogue, being alone and with 'someone' at the same time.

Perhaps it is this that makes horses so engaging, they appear to listen and respond to you with movements and sounds, to mirror your emotions but unlike a person, in a non-judgemental way. As in Marie's account of her horse, acknowledging her grief, and nudging her as she cried or the cancer sufferer clutching her horse's neck and him responding by exhaling, thus accepting her fully in the moment, feeling her thinking as an unconscious level of awareness.

The ability to focus outside of the self to gain authenticity is also important and the women describe their life with their horses. Horses provide an escape and allow a focus of attention away from the daily grind, they act as a stress reducer as Lynne describes.

Lynne: The stress thing, it, it's lowers stress levels (mmm). My horses do that for me, if I'm uptight about something, I only have to go out there (mmm) and be with them for a little bit and I come back feeling (oh yeah) um, more mellow that I was (l) when I went out.

However, Claire reminds us that our horses can be a source of potential stress. She prides herself in being punctual and was nearly late to the interpretative community. This is her reason.

Claire: No, I was quite uptight when, ahh, I've left that gate open and munch, munch, munch

and I grabbed Charlie because he is the ringleader and got him in and then I pushed Silver through the gate and then the other horse Longie decided he would go galloping around the garden, I went off after he and he span off the other way and arggg ... but I was on time

As you can imagine the telling of this story was much enhanced by huge body movements and gestures which you as a reader cannot access except through my meagre description. You can read the emphasis ‘*ahh*’, and ‘*argg*’ but the hearing of them added more to the story than can be gleaned from reading the text in transcript. Claire finishes quietly reminding us that she was not actually late despite having to round up three unruly horses in the dark, who like naughty children had escaped.

Veronica: You definitely forget about everything because you’re so busy (yeah) concentrating on what you are doing (yeah)

Sara: It’s that whole mixture again, isn’t it, of being, doing rides to blow out the cobwebs and forget about everything or where you have a new focus and

Rosa: So you’re concentrating on what you are doing with the horse

Sara: Yeah

Rosa: And you’re putting everything else behind you

Sara: Yeah, yes that’s right you forget about it because you’re concentrating or on a bad day it creates it’s own (l) problems (Gl).

In this exchange Sara proposes a shared experience of ‘*blowing out cobwebs and forgetting*’.

Rosa responds supportively by adding her own understanding of that shared experience, leaving her worries metaphorically behind her as she rides along. Rosa provides social support for Sara that validates her feelings. Sara returns us to a reality that horses can be a cause of a problem in our lives, such as a lame horse requiring costly care and attention as well as a source of worry.

The earliest memories of self may be part of the authentic self that has been hidden away by subsequent layers of enculturation (Lasher, 1998) by non-horsey others as we learn who we can disclose our passion to without risk of being judged negatively. This resembles Sorenson’s (1996) liminal consciousness that he describes as open and direct as opposed to the cloaked and self-serving persona we expose for the modern world. Happily, amongst horses and other horsey people we are free to be our authentic selves and find commonality and support for our feelings. This can be seen in all the bracketed ‘*mmm*’ and ‘*yes*’ comments in the quotes from the focus groups. This level of support between the woman participants may be at a therapeutic and healing level as we are free to be our authentic selves and to share our feelings about our horses in a positive and valued environment. Effective counsellors are empathetic listeners (Rogers, 1957), a trait described by these women about their horses. Other positive traits of a counsellor that horses provide, such as unconditional positive regard and congruency are discussed later in the chapter on engagement. Horses also allow us to engage fully in the moment as we play games and have fun.

7.6 For fun

Regarding authenticity horses provided the women participants with a chance to be free to be childlike and playful, to be able to have a passion with fun, bringing zest into their lives, with humour, pleasure and enjoyment. A difference emerges between the focus groups. Rosa, Sara and Claire, in the first focus group, expound this as a mixture of fun and danger in riding. Whereas Lynne summaries a shared understanding from the woman participants of the second focus group, which were generally more passive in their approach to horses, deriving enjoyment from the caretaking of their horses.

Claire: Oh, when we go to the beach and you have a good ride and a good gallop and it's such a rush and you go home and you're (mmm) all buzzy (mmm)

Rosa: Geed up (on a high)

Sara: And you have that combination of doing stuff where you're working the horse (yeah) and where you just think

Claire: And it's just sheer enjoyment

Sara: It's good fun (yeah)

Claire: A bit of danger thrown in (l)

Sara: (l)Yeah

Lynne: I have a lot of pleasure out of them and get a lot of enjoyment [just watching them].

The talk between Sara and Claire below shows that they were able to have more fun at locally run gymkhana than the children who were lined up taking the whole thing very seriously. It was as if the horses allowed these women to regress safely and gave them a chance to be childlike and playful again, even slightly naughty, remembering carefree times from their authentic past.

Claire: Yes, when we are having games

Sara: Oh, yeah

Claire: At Riding Club (yes) (Gl)

Sara: What giving the judge cheek

Rosa: You were playful

Sara: What's that, the sack race when you jumping, (Gl) you've done that when you like this big and you didn't have so far to fall over (mmm). Or when you go out jump on bareback with the halter and lead rope (l) and just (l) play around.

Sara: Helen and Leeza spark off together as well and we all know each other, it was just such fun, games and everything,

Claire: And just doing stuff like barrel racing, where you can go flat stick

Sara: Yeah

Claire: And just really enjoy it (mmm)

Ruth: Do you compete in the Masters' Games?

Veronica: I have done for the last few times, yes.

Ruth: Oh good for you

Veronica: And I've thoroughly enjoyed it

Sara: Yes, we're old enough to do some parts of it now (Gl)

Ruth: Oh, listen

Sara: I was old enough to do the last one and didn't

Sara: Great fun

Ruth: I haven't done that since I was a kid it would be great
Sara: It is great fun

The emotions of joy are shared as the women participants re-live their experiences and the positive feelings of well-being are vicariously transmitted to others in the group as evidenced by the bouts of general laughter. This could be described as affect contagion. Happiness and joy had spread through the group. Affect contagion has been applied by Issroff (2005) to explain burn out amongst therapists who experience vicarious traumatization and empathic numbing in their support of trauma victims. He states that these negative feelings become uncontrollable and are non-verbalizable and continue to spread like a contagious disease and can re-occur in time, places, and persons in a chaotic and non-predictable manner, even affecting the therapists' families. If this is the case then positive affect contagion experienced within a group of horsewomen sharing happiness might benefit people therapeutically and Meyer (2002) reported Kacey, a victim of Columbine was returned to a happy life through her connection with horses and horse people (see Rider Interrupted on page 1).

Chapter 8 Engagement

Engagement can be described as attunement to the other, being in the here and now and being committed to the relationship. In this chapter I will explore the harmonious relationship these women participants have with their horses, firstly as friends and then as companions. As friends horses engage in the relationship: they give unconditional acceptance, validate these women as they approach and provide a secure attachment, a bond with an empathetic other. As companions horses provide these women participants the presence of an 'other', a sentient being who offers a physical entity to be touched, a tactile comfort. Then I will discuss how being in the here and now provides recreational distraction from worries and reduces perceived stress levels, so improving the women's psychological health. In the last section I provide evidence for the women's engagement in the relationship as measured by their level of commitment.

8.1 *Horse as a friend*

Engagement can be defined as sharing in activities with others and if attuned to an other, you are appropriately adjusted to the other which results in harmony. This section provides an insight into the importance the women participants placed on the relational health benefits of being engaged with another sentient being, their horse. As friends for the women participants' horses are engaged fully in the relationship in the moment. Their horses acknowledge their arrival and seek proximity, valuing the woman. In this friendship attachment and bonding occurs, reflected in mutual trust and security. In mirroring emotions the horses reveal they are engaged in the relationship.

8.1.1 *Unconditional acceptance*

With humour, a shared understanding emerges of this unconditional acceptance. The many 'mmm's (below) reveal that comments are fully supported. Claire reflects my use of the word 'make up' implying that horsewomen rarely use it. She implies it is not a mask or false self expected in her world of horsey friends. Evidence that the horses are engaged in the relationship is provided and the women do not feel judged by the extrinsic values of appearance or mood.

Sara: I've always liked all animals ... a horse is a bit more of a partnership.

Ruth: You don't have to, you know, put your make up on, you know, (l) to be with your horses do you?

Sara: No that's true

Claire: I find most horsey girls aren't high make up

Ruth: This is true (l)

Claire: High maintenance girls (Gl) because they don't, it doesn't really mix (yeah)

Sara: I guess you don't feel judged (mmm), it's the same thing with all animals, they don't judge

the same way as we do (no, mmm) , so you don't care about what you are looking like (exactly) and if your nose is running (Gl) and (l) what sort of a grumpy mood you are in (l) it's sort of Claire: And you wear old clothes (mmm) because you're just going to get dirtier, so (mmm)

These understandings were also explicated with humour and general consensus in the other focus group. We are able to leave our ego at the paddock gate as our horses as friends do not evaluate our wealth, clothes or body image, they just accept us for who we are. Sheldon & Kassler (2001) found evidence that relationship quality and well-being are improved when those involved place an importance of intrinsic values such as growth, rather than status, money, and image, which are considered extrinsic values. Horses provide such intrinsic values for the women's authentic growth and seek proximity when they approach.

8.1.2 Greeting, attachment and bonding

The women participants arrive at a shared understanding that their horses recognise their approach and greet them like a friend. As Lynne describes her horses greeting behaviour the other women participants provide positive feedback.

Lynne: Yes, they, they just love you no matter what...they are always ready to greet you whenever, you're there (mmm) aren't they, they're just love to see you... I really enjoy the way mine will call out to me, whenever (oh yes) they see me (mmm), as soon as they hear me coming (yes). They might even hear me before they see me and um, it's not for food (no), it's not even feed time (mmm) and they're still right there.

Ruth: There's a nicker

Lynne: Yes (yeah)

Ruth: They're looking up (yeah), 'where are you' (yeah)

Lynne affirms my use of word 'nicker' and then I continue to describe the change in the horses' behaviour. Their alerting response 'looking up', raising their heads from grazing, and orientating to my approach, reveal a level of engagement in the relationship. My choice to give voice to the horse and anthropomorphise the behaviour is validated by the other women. The greeting behaviours are interpreted by the women participants as the horse was glad to see them.

Ruth: They are friends and companions for me, I think (mmm). They would nicker when, (mmm) when I approach and (mmm) they would approach me, even if I've not got food (Gl), or they just

Sara: Yeah, I've got one or two like that, so always

Ruth: I'm sure the horses recognise my vehicle.

Sara: Oh yeah

Rosa: Of course they do, yes, yes.

Ruth: They all come up to the, up to the fence (mmm), and I get out and they're whinnying (mmm).

Claire: Or you come with the float on (yeah) and they all rush to see who's coming (Gl)

Sara: 'Who's coming' or 'who's going' or 'what's happening' (l)?

Ruth: And where have they been? (l)

Sara: Horse used to recognise my scooter, when I had a nina (oh), neeeeer as I drive and the horses look up and 'here she is' (Gl).

Ruth: What just associate the food then? (Gl)

Sara: No

Ruth: No, just glad to see you

Sara: Yeah (l)

Such proximity seeking behaviour is considered to be evolutionary designed and part of a biological based motivational system called attachment. In these extracts the women participants discount the idea that the approach behaviour is motivated by a previously conditioned response to the expectation of a food reward. They felt their horses were fully engaged in their relationship and felt validated by their horses, who acknowledge their arrival with vocalisations and approach behaviour. The daily greetings allowed the women participants to experience happiness and joy which may open them to experience such positive emotions at other time during the day. A bond exists between the women and their approaching horses. Sara places the human traits of curiosity and happiness, anthropomorphising her horses, voicing their questions by saying 'who's coming', 'who's going' and 'what's happening'.

The concept of the horses being glad to see the approaching women was life affirming. Claire had not experienced this close mutual attachment with her first horse but her other horses have now provided her with this level of recognition which she values in their engaging friendship.

Claire: That's what I said, I didn't realise what a bastard Charlie was (oh right) until I got Spice and Spice was a lot more affectionate (mmm) and Silver is as well (mm), you know when I walk across the paddock, he nickers out and walks to me (mmm) and he stands there and you know (yeah)

Ruth: Oh that's nice that they notice you

Claire: That's a positive feature... I'd say horses recognise people ... and your smell as well (yeah).

These women participants agree that horses recognise and react to the sounds that are associated with your approach, but also the sight of you as an individual. It is unlikely that a horse has an innate schema corresponding to the human form. However, they do recognise individual humans. It is more likely that they are attending to specific global features, such as clothing and body movements than to face or voice (Grzimek, 1944). Claire adds another sensory modality as an antecedent of the human-animal bond. She posits that horses also rely on their sense of smell in the recognition of their human friends and her comment is affirmed and developed in Chris's greeting discourse given later.

Another human concept, that of 'missing' an absent friend is discussed below as Marie describes her daughter's now silent horse. The horse's vocalisation behaviour in anticipation of the approach of the attached human is expressed and affirmed by one of the other women.

Marie: One of my daughters, he [the horse] would call out to her from, he would hear her

coming down when we were at a show, and you'd hear him calling out (mmm) to her and she's been gone overseas now for ten months and I haven't heard a noise out of him (ohh)

Ruth: Oh really, that's sad isn't it

Marie: Mmm

Ruth: I wonder if that's missing, if they have the concept of missing someone

Marie: He just, oh it could be the concept, it could be the fact that she had a lot more time than I did and she loved him (mmm), or loves him and um, you know, she's the horse person ... she's always been the horse one, although we tried, although my husband went into Clydesdales for a while.

Marie feels guilty she does not have the time to engage in the relationship at the same level as her daughter even though she has 'tried'. The use of the word 'we' preceding the verb indicates her thoughts still includes her deceased husband. She is speaking for both of them at that moment. Chris and I co-construct the meaning related to the behaviour of a horse when a 'missing' human re-appears and the different sensory modalities involved in the recognition process are explored.

Chris: I'd been away a month, I'd been overseas ... it was the longest I'd been away from her for.....the first night she was all wound up but the second night she was licking me all over....

Ruth: She was glad to have you back

Chris: Yes

Ruth: and wanted to get your scent again

Chris: She's a nippy little thing, but yeah she was licking the top of my hair and everywhere

Ruth: just wanted your smells

Chris: I felt that you could trust her because sometimes you have just got to be a bit wary of her (l) (Gl) but no, she was fine.

Ruth: Saying welcome home.

Lynne: It is, yeah.

Chris's description of returning to her horse reminds me of Ainsworth's Strange Situation experiment. Chris is returning to her securely attached horse. The rebuff on the first visit may be due to the horse not expecting her, *she was 'all wound up'* at being cared for by sitters, and did not even recognise Chris. On the second visit the horse is fully engaged in the relationship and seems to be re-establishing contact to re-engage in the relationship. A fourth sensory modality is included; by licking the horse is applying its sense of taste. Previously we have discussed the part of sound, sight and smell in the recognition process. The full spectrum of senses involved in a horse's socio-sensual awareness is discussed in Chapter 11.

In this connection the proxemics of attachment were described in the mutual attachment or significant bond these women have for their horses. In their relationship with horses an important life affirming quality for these women was trust which confirms Mitchell's (2000) research on the spiritual ways of being human for a group of women with connections to animals. The attachment behaviour of proximity seeking has been described and the women participants also provide evidence of their horses' engagement in the relationship by describing

the attachment behaviour of following.

Lynne: The Appaloosa would follow me (mmm) everywhere I went, like a dog

Sara: The companionship too, if you've got one's which are really friendly and they follow you round (yeah). If you go out to do something in the paddock, you might not be even in the same paddock, but they'll be over at the fence looking, 'oh what are you doing', 'what are you up to' and follow you round when you're doing things, just trying to be nosey.

As these speakers used the term 'follow' they are supported by other women participants. Sara again uses anthropomorphism and speaks for the horses, giving them the human trait of curiosity, being engaged in the relationship. The philosophical debate over the academic meaning of the terms attachment and bonding would not be productive here, I will place my understanding of these terms for the reader to make a judgement as to whether or not they are being used appropriately to provide evidence for engagement in the relationship. I understand attachment to refer to a motivational system that is biologically based which may be inferred when a horse seeks proximity to the attachment figure as a secure base. This maybe a one-way attachment, however, from the evidence of the love discourse from the women participants I would suggest that it is a mutual attachment or bonding.

Lynne: I love the way they love me, too.

Rosa: I've been so fond of horses, bond with horses

I would define a bond as a stable relationship of affect between two individuals which would also contain a level of security and will provide evidence that mutual feeling of trust and security pervade these women's relationships with their horses.

8.1.3 Trust and security

Mutual trust between a woman and a horse indicates an engagement to the relationship. The security component of a bond is articulated by the women participants as a perception of mutual trust, a horse's trust in the woman and the women's trust given to the horse. Firstly, Lynne describes a peak experience for her, the trust her horse had in her. The other women participants are fully engaged in her account of the awe inspiring episode. Then stories reveal how the women engage in their relationship with their horse and trust their horses with their lives.

Lynne: Its that trust thing, you've got that complete trust, togetherness... Only about three weeks after we got her from, from being a wild animal I crept up to her on the ground, creeping (ahh) while she was asleep (aah) on my hands and knees (Gl) and um lay on top of her (ooh), patted her and lay on top of her and I couldn't believe that that had happened, I was on such a high, it was just incredible

Ruth: That's trust (yeah)

This behaviour reveals the horse is secure with Lynne's approach. Horses are prey animals and are usually alert to possible danger of being on the ground so rise when a potential threat approaches. In the interpretative community Lynne re-lives and savours the moment as she tells the women participants of other similar experiences, this time with another of her mares.

Lynne: I said the most fantastic thing that happened to me with my Appaloosa mare, I'd only had her for one or two weeks and she was only three and she was lying in the paddock asleep and I went over to her she didn't get up and put her head on my lap, it was huge, she was a big horse, head on my lap and she went to sleep, her chin was down here and her eyes were closed and she was snoring. I did that many times, but the first time I did it ahhh, ahhh (mmm) I can still feel the feeling that I had, I just couldn't believe the trust (mm) that she had in me not to hurt her or do something to her while she was in that vulnerable position.

What emerges is that Lynne and some of the other women participants could only recall such a level of friendship, engagement or trust with a mare. Midkiff (2001) suggests the close woman-mare bond is inevitable because they share the complexity of hormones in mammalian oestrous cycles. Although the reason for special relationships with a mare is not developed in this research, other women participants in the interpretative community share their stories as they search their memories for similar instances occurring with male horses. Sara, Claire and I provide such counter evidence. In Sara's attempt to provide examples of this trusting behaviour in her male horses she interrupts Claire who was about to speak for her gelding.

Sara: I think Maize will let us up to him, Hope definitely does, she's a mare.

Claire: Charlie has been lying down sunbathing and I've had to go up and put the halter on, and stand back, and 'come on, get up' and he says

Sara: And Mary, oh no, Mary's a mare again, I've had to actually get her up to get her (l)

Ruth: Yes, I've had colts and geldings I can approach while they are lying

This trust is mutual as the women participants place themselves in danger every time they interact with such a large and powerful animal, particularly in competition. Whipper (2000) has investigated trust in the rider-horse relationship in the equestrian discipline of Eventing and further research is needed to fully understand this phenomenon. The feelings of security that the women participants describe are part of the emotional system in Weiss's (1998) attachment taxonomy of a relationship. Sometimes, however, that trust breaks down and the bond breaks. Such a breakdown occurs between Chris and a pony. Zoe sets Chris up to tell the story.

Zoe: But you had an absolutely beauty accident, eh, on the tar seal

Chris: I had a um, the pony I was riding ... and the next minute I was sitting in the saddle (demonstrates being sideways) with the horse on top of me. I lost my, that's the first time I've actually lost my nerve because normally when I ever come off I know that I am going down, but this time, nothing, I was just down with it lying on top of me, it had tripped itself up or something. I was alright, I lay there for a while, then the neighbours came out of the house, 'oh, she's broken her, broken her leg', I said 'get away from me, get away from me', because I hadn't shaved my legs (Gl).

Ruth: Isn't it funny what you worry about (Gl)

Chris: Then my arm felt like it, my collar bone felt like it was out and the chap that was with me didn't even, wasn't aware it had even happened, umm, until people started yelling, but I got back on and he said 'get (shouting) back on', but I was in so much pain and then finally I did get on and I rode three times after that and then I completely lost it. I couldn't ride that pony again, it was because I couldn't trust it (mmm). If it hadn't stumbled (mmm) I would have been able to but because (clapping hands vertically), it went like that, like a deck of cards going straight down.

Chris distances herself from the pony in the words she uses. She removes herself from the bond by changing 'the pony' and 'the horse' to 'it', thus blaming 'it' for the accident. Having discussed previously how these women participants did not feel they had to present a false self to their horses, Chris's main concern subsequent to the fall was not any physical injury she may have experienced but her worry was that people coming to her aid would notice she had hairy legs, which was obviously not acceptable to her in terms of her public image. Extrinsic values of image were causing her anxiety as she did not believe she fitted the norm as she perceived it. I attempted to reduce her anxiety by introducing a level of humour and the women participants laughed it off. Another interesting point is Chris's interaction with her male co-rider after her fall. He had not realised something had happened until bystanders alerted him and then he forcefully directed her to remount. In her story she pre-empts his command and is already mounted despite being in pain.

Chris and that pony were not engaged in a friendly relationship and she withdrew from the bond. In a story given later Sara's lack of trust was contingent on the situation; she would not trust her horse out hunting again but still considered him a friend. In the interpretative community the women participants attempted to come to a shared understanding of the features responsible for a close bond with a specific horse.

Sara: Someone asked me today, which one's your favourite horse (l)

Claire: Equi, I'd say

Sara: Yeah, what do you do, it would have to be him, he is the one that I have had the longest (yeah) and he was the first, mmm. Yes, it would have to be Equi, although he is not the competitive one anymore and he is a grumpy old snot (Gl) Yes, went for a toddle up the road on him today and it was nice, yeah, just cruised along (l). He would still have to be the favourite.

Claire: It would have to be Charlie. I had horses before him but I have had him so long

Sara: The length of time

Claire: I prefer to ride Charlie myself; because he is such an old armchair ... he's just so comfortable

Ruth: You know their every move and can react

Sara: Even when they are silly you know what they are going to do

Claire: That's even with his incredibly bad tempered temperament ... and not at all affectionate ... not a pleasure to groom ... throws tantrums non stop, but even with all that (l) ...he likes his head being rubbed but any other part of his body

Sara: He demands his head being rubbed, doesn't he?

Claire: Yeah... threatens to bite me but he doesn't ... he's saying his point

Sara: It would be interesting to think whether it's actually because they are the first or whether

it's actually the length of time

Sara and Claire co-construct the two important factors in deciding the strength of the bond they have with their horses. A first horse in their lives was important and the longest partnership. For Sara, her favourite had both these qualities, Claire's favourite horse qualified because of the length of their relationship. Claire speaks for Sara and declares her friends favourite horse, Sara agrees and gives the two reasons. Interestingly enough for these two friends, their favourite horses also shared a personality trait that would be considered negative. Sara describes her favourite horse as being '*a grumpy old snot*' and Claire says her favourite as '*not affectionate*', '*incredibly bad tempered*' and '*threatens to bite*'. She then excuses this behaviour as he is '*saying his point*'. Thus these two women disclose that in their closest bond with a horse they tolerate grumpy and threatening behaviour. Another factor that emerged from their talk together was the bond with their favourite horse provided evidence for a secure base for riding - they trusted these 'friends' with their life. Sara confirmed the pleasant feeling associated with riding him, she '*just cruised along*' and Claire said '*he is such an old armchair ... he's just so comfortable*'. The feeling of security within the relationship may derive from their ability as a rider to be at one with the horse, to anticipate actions of the horses from moment to moment and react accordingly. Sara and I express the engagement in the relationship in the here and now.

Sara: Even when they are silly you know what they are going to do.

Ruth: You know their every move and can react

This feeling of engagement was not evident between Chris and the pony that fell. She could not predict it would drop '*like a deck of cards*'. She had no warning to take preventative action to minimise the effect of the fall. The horse provided no protection for Chris.

8.1.4 Altruistic protection?

Horses can protect these women, making them feel more secure. In this next excerpt the women participants are discussing the different sorts of protective behaviour afforded by a horse and whether it was truly altruistic on the horse's part as they were fully engaged in the relationship as a friend or merely for self preservation.

Ruth: [hunting] on the Moors in North Yorkshire there were boggy bits ... the horses were galloping and we were probably near the front, well, were at the front ... and she just suddenly slowed down and stopped (mmm) and I thought 'what on earths wrong here' so I was pushing her on. In the meantime the other horses had caught me up (mmm) and they went past me and the next thing

Sara: There's the boggy bit

Ruth: Yeah (Gl) in to their, on to their tummies

Rosa: She knew

Ruth : and she knew (yeah) and she had stopped and saved me falling off ...she just had a sixth sense about safety

As I set the scene and introduce the characters, the other women participants are fully engaged and Sara and Rosa share my understanding and complete the story. The function of the laughter is to diffuse the tension created by the description of the mass accident rather than the incident being funny. Arguably, it might not have been an altruistic act by my horse to save me from being grounded, but why didn't the other horses preserve themselves, not least their riders? Zoe provides more evidence for the argument.

Zoe: my grandfather [had] pack horses and that's how they got in and out fifty-odd miles from town. I remember hearing a story from my grandfather saying that the tracks were just wide enough for gigs and traps and this horse just stopped, flatly refused to go any further, and it was pitch dark, because they would just sort of, travel all night long and the horse would not move and there was no track and they, no-one had seen it but the horse had, you know, and (mmm) that's the safety thing ...It knew the road was missing.

In the interpretative community, Sara provides another example, a fictional comparison for Zoe's account, that at least horses can sense danger.

Sara: Like in Black Beauty when the bridge had been washed out

Evolutionary theory would suggest that subsequent to detecting danger, the horse's behaviour is purely to save itself from possible harm. This next dialogue about Show Jumping concludes with a compromise on the issue of who the horse is protecting from possible harm, themselves or their friend, the rider. Marie begins with an emphatic belief that it is for self preservation.

Marie: Oh themselves because I've watched her come down the treble and come off at the first treble, finish the next two jumps hanging round the horse's neck like this (demonstrates arms up around horse's neck) (Gl) and at the end of it the horse went (jerk demonstrated) threw her back on looked at her and said 'where's the next one', you know, um, he wasn't out to hurt her... Regarding doing as asked by rider, do you actually think they want to

Stella: Or maybe they don't mind or

Marie: Or they're not thinking enough

Stella: No, I think they think. I mean

Lynne: Yes, I think they think, yes (mmm)

Stella: Because they get you out of trouble (mmm) some of them

Marie: Oh, they get themselves out of trouble, are they considering you or are they considering themselves

Stella: Probably a bit of both

Laughter again ameliorates the anxiety caused by the potential for injury that Marie's daughter may have suffered and she anthropomorphises the horse's behaviour, suggesting it had no intent to harm her, actually it intended to put the rider back in the saddle and was now ready to get on with the task of jumping the next obstacle. Later she questions whether the horse's behaviour is due to previous training, responding to conditioned cues, and not a conscious choice. She is

quickly countered by Stella and Lynne who believe horses do have conscious thought and Stella says that in some instance they do get the rider 'out of trouble'. This dialogue reaches no shared understanding of why a horse will prevent a likely fall at a jump. Perhaps being engaged in the relationship, being fully in the moment the horse uses all its sensory modalities to tune into the imbalance, muscular tensions and feelings of impending doom of the rider. An experienced competition horse can then make the necessary adjustments to right the imbalanced novice rider. The level of attunement, using a range of sensory modalities will be discussed next.

8.1.5 Attunement, tuning the senses and mirroring emotions

Horses are attuned to the relationship with humans, using all sensory modalities to engage fully in the relationship. Stories of horses as friends are told that describe the horses' attunement to the relationship and reveal the horses as natural empaths, mirroring the emotions of the humans around them in a form of emotional resonance. This section interweaves with the horse as a counsellor theme. Marie is supported when she mentions that horses have no agenda and the following excerpts establish that horses act as mirrors of our emotions and intent.

Marie: As far as purity of thought and um lack of motive for things they do (mmm)

The women participants share stories of young children engaging in a relationship with a horse. Claire is supported as she describes some of the 'bizzare' behaviours that horses will allow in children.

Claire: Kids run up and go for the flank (mmm) or just under the belly and go toward the back
Sara: I expect we think adults to have more internal commonsense about that but they don't always

Sara's comment assumes that adults should not conceive of such unsafe behaviour around a horse and Lynne described her horse-naïve husband as bowling in, where she would fear to tread. In the next excerpts Lynne and Zoe describe their horses' response to very young, horse-naïve children.

Lynne: The horses are very tolerant of him, it's as if they know he's just a little fellow and they just accommodate for him.

Ruth: When there is someone vulnerable, they seem to know.

Zoe: They do

Lynne: We put my grandson on the top of the brown gelding and the Kaimanawa gelding and there were both fine. The Kaimanawa was a little bit unsure at first but they both let him sit, he was only two and a half. It was the first time ever that they had had a child of that age on their back, the Kaimanawa in particular and he was fine.

Lynne's story is developed and affirmed by the others and her use of the word 'tolerant' to describe the horses reaction to the young child is reflected in Zoe's talk below. When Zoe

pauses I make explicit the possible source of danger that she perceives. Zoe dramatically exhales indicating that she had thought the same and confirms it verbally, adding that an adult acting in a similar way would be treated differently by a horse. Horses pick up fear in adults, detect it and resonate that fear back to the nervous adult, amplifying the magnitude.

Zoe: There was my two year old out in the paddock trying to put the horse cover on and she was standing just so perfect (mmm) and he was trying to get it up, but if she'd run, that rope could have (pause)

Ruth: Gone round him and

Zoe: (exhales) Yeah, and she was so tolerant. If an adult had just carried a horse cover (mmm) over, she would have (indicates spinning and running away) she would have not, ay.

Lynne: Is that because those children, like my grandson, are fearless and they don't show fear... they haven't learned (mmm) to be afraid...my grandson is not scared at all, he is not frightened at all.

Lynne questions the other women participants as to the reason for the horses' differential behaviour positing that the young children show no fear. Lynne then agrees with me implying a lack of fear means confidence and thus the horses are 'mirroring [the] confidence' of the children. An extract from the other focus group reveals that Rosa had experienced this tolerant behaviour in horses and their reaction to vulnerable humans. Claire and Sara continue and co-construct the understanding that horses reflect the specific rider, knowing they can be naughty for an experienced rider, testing the limits of the rider.

Rosa: They always know (mmm) when there is someone helpless on board (yeah)

Claire: Yeah Sara will get on him and he knows she's experienced (Gl) so he will put in the odd buck

Sara: He's a sod (l)

Claire: You know and he'll

Sara: yeah

Claire: He just have her, try her out (l)

Sara: They feel that extra weight (yes) on their backs and

Ruth: And they won't act the same (mmm) How do they know the worry bit though?

Sara: I've wondered that

Rosa: Oh it's just a feeling, it's you know (mmm)

Claire: They know it (mmm)

Ruth: yeah

Rosa: It's just, I mean it's vibrations through your body, if you're nervous and tense (mmm), the horse can feel that (yeah) and you know if you are a bit uncertain 'oh oh lor, how am I going to do this', 'what is this', 'what's it going to do on top of me'.

Sara: Because they feel that fear even if you're not on them though (yes) it's not even your body tension (mmm) that it is (mmm)

Rosa: Oh it is

Sara: It comes out doesn't it?

Sara's wondering shows her previous explanation does not explain this phenomenon and Rosa and Claire indicate that it is a feeling, a knowing. Rosa's explanation is fully supported by the others. They agree that the horse is alerted by the direct physical contact from the nervous person. Horses speak and listen in a tactile mode through their sensitive skins (Hearne, 1994).

Each muscular movement of a nervous novice rider would be akin to shouting and most of the message would be unintentional and have to be disregarded as 'tactile noise' by the horse. Horses opened up an imagery of all senses for these women as they attuned between self and other. Sara elaborates and extends the horses detection of a person's fear from a distance as if some energy '*comes out*' of them. This reminds me of Clever Hans, a horse famous for his mathematical skills, counting out answers to simple arithmetic by pawing the ground. He was able to respond to minute unintentional non-verbal cueing of the eyebrows, head and posture of the owner, the German, Herr Von Osten (Katz, 1927, cited in Williams 1976). It is not extreme, therefore, to believe that horses perceive slight movements within the body language of people, a slight postural tension due to anxiety and thus detect the mood or emotional state of a human.

Further evidence that horses are engaged in the relationship is given by Chris's description about a nervous child being forced by her parents to approach her highly sensitive pony. The horse has an accurate empathetic understanding and is sensitive to and reflecting the emotions of the approaching human.

Chris: They pushed their daughter on, to going on, and my pony was okay with that but as she walked along she felt the tension from the child...

Ruth: So she picked up from the nervousness

Chris: Mmm

Ruth: of the child and actually mirrored it even more.

Chris: Yes

This may not be a successful relationship as the nervous disposition of the child was channelled and this personality trait was projected onto the pony and amplified. However, the capacity of a horse to be genuinely engaged in the relationship and reflect positive emotions of the human provides a high level of relational efficacy; the horse is emotionally present, attuned and authentic (from Marie's '*purity of thought*' comment). This is the basis for a successful friendship that would provide a growth-fostering relationship (Jordan, 2000). The relational model recognizes women's need for growth-fostering relationships and if this can be based upon a level of mutuality in a genuine friendship, such as that between a horse and a woman, then it may be considered the highest expression of moral excellence (Stocker, 2005).

8.2 Horse as a companion

Horses also provide long term companions for the women participants. They are another living, warm being that they can interact with on an every day basis at an intimate level of body-to-body contact. Horses provide companionship support for the women participants in the form of intrinsic satisfactions. The shared pleasure in recreation, relaxation and spontaneity fosters

positive mental health for these women. Rosa is supported as she mentions her horses have been her companions through her horse obsessed life. Her disclosure elicits laughter from the other women participants who can understand and relate to her passion.

Rosa: Oh, that's alright, my horse has always been my, well companions, you know (mmm), I mean because I've been so fond of horses, bond with horses that I was never interested in men, or boys or going out (Gl) I think it was just horses, horses, horses, it was just horses, horses, horses (Gl)...It's lasted seventy odd, seventy years, um but, you know, it's just the companionship, I don't know, just, just always been fond of horses, not necessarily the riding part at all.

She explains that it is the close proximity of the horse's body that is important to her.

Rosa: Um, Josie and I set out for a ride, at half an hour, an hours ride was quite enough for me and she said 'I don't know why you ride' and I say 'it was just the contact, the you know (mmm) the closeness of the horse'.

Rosa reports that her friend Josie cannot understand why she only rides for such a short period, but it is the companionship, their presence that provides what she needs, a source of physical contact. This contact involves the grooming and preparation for the ride and the post-ride care activities for the horse. The extended contact with horses which does not involve riding is important for these women participants and Lynne is supported as she articulates it as '*just being there with them*', as a companion.

Lynne: It's just the interaction with the horses (mmm) and watching what they do ... fun of my horses is just being there with them, (mmm) just interacting with them, watching them, even picking up the blimen horse poo (ooo) every day. You go out and while you are doing that you're interacting with them

Ruth: They're coming along to nuzzle you (yeah)

Lynne: Yes, yes, so it's, it's even that, it's everything to do with them (mmm) it's just being there with them and 'cos as I said I don't ride them that often, I'd like to ride more (mmm) but it's just being, having them there so we can talk to them, and um, brush them and just go out and, you know, be with them really.

Although Lynne agrees with my suggestion that the horse approaching and making physical contact enhances the companionship, Lynne is committed to establishing the idea that just '*having them there*' to talk to and to '*be with them*' satisfies her.

The shared understanding that emerges below confirms my suggestion about the important role of physical contact in the companionship between the women participants and their horses. Each is mutually engaged in the relationship, dancing around each other, reacting to the other in the here and now.

Sara: Yeah, just standing around grooming them [by hand] and giving them a scratch

Rosa: Quality time sort of thing in your life

Sara: Yeah

Ruth: Do you have one's that you start scratching them in a place and they (yes) and you stand back and then they'll, they'll move their head

Rosa: Oh yes

Ruth: To somewhere else on their leg, saying 'here, you've got to scratch here next'.

Sara: Or they'll move, if you're scratching up by wither and they actually want to be scratched here [indicates lumbar area of back] they'll just move forward a bit (yes) so they always end up in the right place

Rosa: Or lean on you, or

Sara: Yep, or their turn round and try to start scratching you back (Gl)

Ruth: They're only doing it to be friendly to you (Gl)

Sara: And they nip you it's not so good (mmm), or they pull funny faces, you know where the little particular spots (mmm) are and they're ooo ooo

Ruth: And the lip goes

Rosa: Extends like trunks

Claire: Charlie does it, he's got a bit on his back where he can't reach so he'll turn around, try to reach it and look at me (yeah) (Gl) and I'll scratch it and he'll bend and the lip will go up (yeah, yeah) and he'll just about fall over, just ecstasy (yes), he'll just about collapse (Gl) and he'll, yeah it's just hilarious.

Rosa: Eddie was like that if he got a tick, you know, 'cos we were out in the forest we get these ticks, and he'd walk round and round the paddock behind you and he'd walk up behind you and hold up his leg and he'd start scratching and he'd have his hind leg up and put his head round, so I was stuck, he would hold me there (Gl) until he (Gl) and then he'd lean on me and hold me tight so I couldn't (Gl) and I said Eddie 'stop' and I'd whack him with me other hand and he'd put his leg down and he'd look at me, 'ohh she'd stopped scratching' (l) (Gl). It was so funny Josie couldn't believe it first time saw me, it was following me across the paddock and it kept stopping, when I stop, and and he'd hold up his leg for me to scratch him and then he'd make sure I'd stay there because he'd trap me with his head (Gl)

Sara: That's ridiculous.

Ruth: His head all the way round?

Rosa: Yes

Sara: That's really funny

Claire: It's funny

Rosa: Oh, oh, he was the sweetest horse

Lynne: My Kaimananwa, he backs into me to have his bottom scratched (mm) all the time, he just loves it.

The activity of mutual grooming provides a time for quality interaction as the women are aware that their horses are enjoying the experience. Engaged in the relationship the women follow the lead from their horse and scratch the zone indicated by their horse. I translate my horses head turning into actual words and speak for my horse. Sorenson (1996) distinguishes between the consciousness of postconquest rationalism and the focus on what feels good in preconquest consciousness. He believes that indigenous pre-colonial individuals use a high level of skin-skin contact in communication and are highly sensitive, reading muscle tension in others to indicate subtle shifts in mood, a form of liminal awareness, termed socio-sensual awareness. He proposes that the motivation of preconquest consciousness is to optimize feelings of well-being in the community; perhaps horses are reminding these women of a once important sense and re-connecting them to be able to feel their joy.

The women are sensitive to and interpret a range of signals from their horses; they are in tune with their horses. Claire's sensitivity to correctly interpret her horse as an individual is evident in the extract below.

Claire: It was a really hot, it was a hot spring day and I went out and took Charlie's cover off and he actually came to me (mmm) and he followed me to the gate, and I thought what's wrong here, and I was giving him a scratch and then I noticed his lip, a little bit of blood on his mouth (yes) and it had actually torn all under here (oh) [indicates in mouth] and he was just like telling me something was wrong (yeah) and I had to get the vet out and he got two layers of stitches inside his mouth and (w'oh)

Rosa: How'd he done that?

Claire: I've no idea ... but something was funny today

Ruth: He was trying to tell you something (yeah)

Claire: He came to me (mmm) and I took his cover off and he followed me to the gate and (mmm)

From previous experience this horse does not initiate or even like contact, but now seeks her out. She is alerted to his change in behaviour so is careful to find the reason. Intuitively (or guided by cues from the horse) she quickly locates an injury not visible from merely observing the horse. The supporting comments from the women participants indicate a shared understanding that a change in a horse's behaviour signifies a message that must be read. Claire confirms the peculiar behaviour of this horse and reports '*he came to me*' and '*he followed me*'. These attachment behaviours were not usual in this horse's repertoire. This provides evidence that the women participants are engaged in and attuned to the relationship and in this case Claire is committed to help her companion in his time of need.

To achieve harmony you have to be open to the perception of all energies emitted from self and others in a situation. Humans learn to block awareness of certain energies, as emotional defence, and become less sensitive to them during a lifetime of culturalisation (Lasher, 1998). When these women participants interact with their horses they unblock sensory modalities and tune into their emotions with their horses. In communicating with their horses they employ more than words and this is reciprocal. The women participants read visual cues from the horse's body movements to predict behaviour and infer mood. They describe their horses as reacting like natural empaths, mirroring the emotions of the approaching human. The women enjoy hearing their horse acknowledging their approach with vocalisations and describe talking to their horse as they might a counsellor.

Using all sensory modalities the women participants were tuning into the physical and emotional presence of another, the horse, and responding to that experience. Thus the horse, in the lives of these women participants, has allowed them to connect and experience attunement, that is, two sentient beings responding to each other's authentic self (Lasher, 1998). Such experiences created a richer inner worldview for the women participants as they connected with

their horses. I support Keil (1990) in her dissertation who believes that any of the senses can be antecedents for human-animal attachment and should be explored further.

The women participants are intimately engaged in their relationship with their horses. As companions, horses provide a living entity to engage in physical contact which is mutually pleasurable. They have described the ecstasy their horses experience from being touched by a human in tune to their desires. A feature of a companion is their constant presence which Lynne alluded to; the horse companions are always available and accessible to the women to 'brush'.

Lynne: ...having them there so we can talk to them, and um, brush them and just go out and, you know, be with them really.

Maintaining the horse in an enclosed paddock, captive for the women, places the women in a position of power in the relationship. This issue of power will be discussed later. The two features touch and constancy will be explored further in the next section.

8.3 For psychological well-being

Horses provide these women with a source of touch and constancy within an engaged relationship. These can enhance the psychological well-being for these women and lower their perceived stress levels. Sara is supported as she describes the physical intimacy of touch when grooming her horse. It is a time to maintain the bond and can be a source of stress reduction, similarly Stella enjoyed the experience.

Sara: Grooming is quite relaxing (mmm) ..., it's nice, a bonding thing (mmm).

Stella: I enjoy, I used to find it [plaiting] very relaxing

Touching their horse in grooming and being included by them in social allogrooming were an important part of the relationship for these women. These activities were reported by the women participants as relaxing and confirm the quantitative study by Hama et al. (1996) on the mutual anxiolytic effects of a human touching a horse. This state of contentment may be due to the effects of oxytocin, released by women when they are stressed and are touching another (Taylor et al., 2000). Odendaal (2000) proposed that there is a basic physiological need of positive interaction, which he called *attention eegens* and horses provide this for these women. The women participants described awareness in the here and now of their body movements and the mutual kinaesthetic behaviour with the horse as one entity.

In this extract below Marie evokes emotional responses from the audience as incomplete meanings and significances of the past are altered by the present. With respect to constancy and

stress reduction, Marie's horses provided her with a relationship she could safely engage in and a source of emotional constancy which supported her during a most difficult period of her life.

Marie: If I hadn't had those horses when my husband died, I think I would have stayed in bed 'til I'd just mummified (mmm)...so if I hadn't had them, I don't know that I'd still even, ... because, I was at that stage where, you know, what's the point of life and all the rest of it, and um, no if I hadn't had the horses I wouldn't still be going.

Ruth: Their steadiness and their just being there, and

Marie: And them needing me (l) (yes), you know (yes, yes).

Ruth: That nurturing, that nurturing bit.

Marie: It is, it is, it's that silly nurturing, giving, yeah um

I provide the term 'steadiness' for Marie, perceiving that her horses are always available to her and will not suffer burnout as human friends may. The horses have provided for Marie a form of instrumental support, the need to feel needed at this crucial time in her life. I reflect Lynne's earlier comment about Marie's horses 'being there' but she adds that their mere presence was not enough; they had to be dependent on her so that she could give something of herself to another. The horses were acting as transitional subjects in her journey of psychological healing. Later I use a more acceptable term for Marie, that is, 'nurturing' and she agrees.

The disclosure by Marie to the other women participants of her authentic feelings, questioning the reason for living in 'what's the point of life and ...if I hadn't had the horses I wouldn't still be going' provide evidence that the horses improved her psychological well-being at such a critical time. The women participants employ supportive 'mmm's and 'oh yeah' while Lynne confirms this effect with reference to how her horses provide psychological support on a day-to-day basis to reduce her perception of stress.

Lynne: The stress thing, it, it's lowers stress levels (mmm) my horses do that for me, if I'm uptight about something, I only have to go out there (mmm) and be with them for a little bit and I come back feeling (oh yeah) um, more mellow that I was (l) when I went out. I think it's Marie: Yes, we're probably lucky we can't actually get them into the house because (Gl) (mm) they would have been by now.

The horse provides social support for the women participants and their constancy ameliorates any stressors and threats to mental health. Marie agrees and interrupts Lynne with humour as she informs the others that she wishes she could increase the proximity of her horses to have an even closer relationship with them by bringing them into the house. Then they would be more immediately available to be nurtured. Veronica adds further evidence that horses are good for the women's' psychological well-being. She is supported by the others as they co-create the positive psychological feeling associated with going out for a ride.

Veronica: Also, mentally to (mmm),

Rosa: Yes

Veronica: I think it has a great effect (yes) if you go for a ride (mmm)
Rosa: I think get up in the morning (ohh)
Veronica: And blow the cobwebs away
Sara: Clear the cobwebs (yes)
Veronica: Come back (mmm) and feel much better (yep) (mmm)
Ruth: Yeah, so (mmm)

Claire offers a contradictory story. She reminds us that horses can provide a temporary source of psychological distress. She cites a situation that had just happened to her. Before arriving at the interpretative community the behaviour of her herd of three geldings had almost caused her to be late. They had entered her garden through a gate she had mistakenly left open.

Claire: No, I was quite uptight when, ahh, 'I've left that gate open' and munch, munch, munch and I grabbed Charlie because he is the ringleader and got him in and then I pushed Silver through the gate and then the other horse Longie decided he would go galloping around the garden, I went off after him and he span off the other way and arggg ... but I was on time.

She situates herself in the text and quickly tells the story to reflect how quickly she had to deal with the situation the horses had presented to her. In this talk, she expresses her frustration with the utterance 'arggg' and took the ultimate responsibility for the horses being in the wrong place. Being engaged in the relationship she reflected on the incident and removed the horses from being the source of her temporary stress and attributed self blame. Other behaviours where these women participants reflect on their relationship with horses are when a time comes to have that relationship terminated.

These women are fully engaged in their relationship with their horse. Loss of such an attachment causes psychological distress and is discussed next. Further evidence that these women participants are fully engaged in the relationship is examined later as they have had to make active choices to enable horses to be part of their every-day lives.

8.4 Grief at bereavement

Bereavement is the process of grieving and is associated with a sense of loss of a significant relationship and the grief experienced at the loss strengthens the concept of attachment. When difficult decisions are made to either sell or euthanise the horse or when the horse dies the women participants are deprived of the important relationship they have with their horse. In the telling of these sad stories the grief the women participants experience is validated by the empathy shown by the others. As they share similar stories of loss they are reminded and reassured that the sorrow and grief they feel are normal responses to the loss of a horse.

8.4.1 Grief at loss of a horse by sale

The decision to sell a horse infers that the woman owns the horses and reminds me of the paradox in the relationship, the woman has power and control over her significant other. To justify the difficult decisions to sell their horses Lynne and I attempt to offer reasons to the other women participants that enable us to remain perceived as caring and supportive partners in the human-horse relationship.

Lynne: I didn't trust my ability as a rider. She needed someone that could ride and know what they were doing that is why she went, and that was awful (mmm) but he is going to let me know when she has her first foal and I'm going to go and see her... he promised me that he doesn't send any of his horse to the knackers yard, they have them put to sleep humanely and they get buried on the farm ... but I can go and see her first baby so that will be good ... I let her go for her sake, not mine, because she needed to be used.

Ruth: ... when we ... emigrated to New Zealand (mmm) ... we'd sold the ... two horses that we had brought on [in training] and were eventing (mmm) and so we'd sold them to good, you know, competition homes...

We both rationalise our decision in that our horses were going to good homes. Good homes had different meanings. For Lynne it was a caring home for life with people that shared her values. My reason was that the new home would improve the horse as an athlete. Lynne believed the reason was in the best interest of the horse as she perceived it needed a more competent rider to 'be used'. In her choice of words she was selling the horse as an object, perhaps to remove herself from the relationship and thus protect herself emotionally.

8.4.2 Grief at loss of a horse by death

Unfortunately horses do not live as long as humans and if you have had horses in your life for many years, one may die in your care. This break down in the relationship is a tragedy and the women's grief at their loss is palpable. The natural death of an aged, ill or injured horse leads to loss and the emotions related to grief, but the decision to have a horse euthanised, to provide 'a good death' is considered the most difficult amongst these women participants and is delayed if possible. In a focus group I disclose to the other women participants about my 'difficult decision' to have a horse euthanised believing it to be in the best interest for the horse, providing a 'good death' for the horse.

Ruth: ... when we ... emigrated to New Zealand (mmm) ... but I didn't want to sell her on, she was twenty-two, twenty-three (mmm) and she was willing, forward going, a wonderful horse and I didn't want to have her abused

Rosa: No

Ruth: To be passed on from one home perhaps to another (yeah) home (yeah) to another home,

Rosa: It's an awful decision

Ruth: Didn't want that, so I m afraid my poor husband had to umm take her in the truck (mmm) and umm take her to the, to the abattoir and err we just decided that would be best.
Sara: It's a even harder decision, isn't it, when they are still in good health
Ruth: Well she had a little bit of arthritis at the time (yeah)
Claire: I suppose you couldn't keep track of her
Sara: Yeah well, you're not even in the country
Claire: You can't, no way
Ruth: I mean, my friends would have taken her but they were, they were full with horses and it would have been just as a favour and I didn't want to see that so. That was a difficult decision (yes).

Rosa immediately supports my decision but her use of the word 'awful' might have meant that the decision was a bad one, not that it was an awful one to make. Sara then articulates the decision to euthanise a healthy horse is 'even harder'. I justified my decision by adding information about the 'arthritis' to protect my image and distance myself from being identified as someone who would put a healthy horse to death. Later Claire supports my decision not to sell the horse and comes to a shared understanding with me that it would have been difficult to maintain contact over the vast distance and ensure the horse was not being abused.

This story was told to the women in an interpretative community who provided evidence of people making such decisions in similar circumstances so attributing the behaviour to situational variables and removing me from the pain associated with my decision.

Zoe: Going back to the First World War, New Zealand soldiers took their horses to over to the Middle East and they left them there and the last service they did for their horse, most of them, they shot them (mmm) because they knew they would not be treated nice by the locals (mmm). I mean how could you shoot your animal, eh. How could you take it over there and not bring it back (mmm), but soldiers didn't come back.
Chris: Sometimes circumstances prevent you, ... you've got to let your head rule your heart sometimes.

Zoe is fully supported by the other women participants as she recounts her historic tale. The function is to provide evidence how others had acted in a similar way in their 'last service ... for their horse' to prevent possible abuse at a later date. Chris's role in the dialogue is to act as the pragmatist, perceiving my decision to be a rational one, based in the cognitive domain. This functioned to protect me by removing me from the emotionality of the decision. Such a decision to end a relationship by having the life of the other ended is loaded with emotions and Sara compares the difference with the loss of an object associated with leisure and recreation.

Sara: It's that whole thing too, it's that it's not like having fun on your motor car or your bike racing or whatever, sure you might crash and it needs to get fixed and it's a pain in the neck and it costs you money (mmm) But with the horse quite apart from all the money side of it as well you've got this thing which is a creature and has feelings and you've got to look after it. Okay looking after it's a chore but it can be too, but you've got feelings for this animal you know has feelings (mmm) Then it has a negative impact on you too, to see it in pain or so sore (mmm) or whatever and it has to be put down and that's a real, yeah, it's quite different from

selling a car (l) or having (mmm) to trash it (mmm)

Sara expounds the idea that the other in this relationship, the horse 'has [mutual] feelings' which is supported by an 'mmm'. This sentiment is reconstructed later in an interpretative community when Lynne and Zoe discuss a horse's sure knowledge of its impending fate while waiting at the abattoir.

Lynne: A few years ago ... this truck dropped this horse off at the works

Chris: At the works, here.

Lynne: Yeah, and the horse was screaming, it was screaming, that was the noise it made, that was the noise that it was making as they were shifting these animals around in the pens there. It knew, it knew and even, I was crying ... I was balling, I wanted to go and rescue it and take him home, 'cos we didn't have a paddock then.

Zoe: It could smell death, eh.

Lynne: Yeah, I could never do that to an animal, to take it somewhere like that, especially a horse, I mean and just leave it, a horse that's given it's all to you and you stick it on a truck and you send it off to the works and let somebody go bomb and that's it and it knows, it knows everything that's happening, they're not stupid animals and it can smell what's going on and I just found that horrific, I just couldn't do it. That's why the Kaimanawas, that's why we saved two of those because I couldn't bear the thought of what they do to the ones they don't want, is to just take them off and shoot them and use them for dog tucker, whatever they do with them. To me it's horrific.

Lynne was obviously agitated as she described the appalling scene, repeating phrases in quick succession, the 'screaming', the 'noise' and 'it knew'. She does not repeat the word she uses to describe the behaviour that manifests the emotion she felt at the time but intensifies it from 'crying' to 'balling'. Her authentic self as nurturer urged her to protect the horse and was put into action when she chose to save two Kaimanawa horses later in her life. Lynne anthropomorphises the vocalisations of the horse and chooses to use the word 'screaming'. This attributes human emotions that would underlay such behaviour in a human. Zoe's part in this reconstruction saying '*It could smell death, eh*' is to suggest the importance of the horse's olfactory sensory cues at the time. The function of 'eh' at the end invites Lynne to continue her story and incorporate this information, which is what Lynne does as she agrees with Zoe and includes this '*it can smell what's going*' as she continues the story. Lynne's words '*I just couldn't do it*' stimulated Chris, acting in the role of the pragmatist to reply with this.

Chris: I've had a horse that they've processed. Not my own ...but it must have had a pinched nerve...and it went off to the knackers yard and I wasn't sorry because to me I used to think like you, but it was a danger to people, you know, it depends on the situation, I used to be quite soft, but now I'm sort of realistic.

Lynne: It is a sad thing (exhales), they are a friend to you and a companion and they, you know, (mmm) give you so much pleasure in your life (mmm)

Although admitting to Lynne she has done it, Chris says two things to protect herself from the loss of the relationship. Firstly, although she rode the horse she did not consider it to be hers and secondly she justifies the reasons why the horse was euthanised as injuries had caused it to be

considered dangerous by humans. In her previous persona she identified with Lynne's 'soft' attitude but now she considers situational variables. Lynne is supported by the other women participants as she reminds them that deciding to end the relationship with a horse in this manner 'is a sad thing' and exhales to impress her point.

The emotions that lead to a decision to euthanise a horse are raw for Lynne. Although she is avoidant about such decisions she now reveals that she is presently supporting her friend, Jane who may have to make such a decision for an old horse. The justification is again given, the aged horse who had become 'really, really unwell'.

Lynne: I don't want to think about those bits, sorry. Well, I'm just going through that with Jane, with her old horse at the moment, ... he got very sick on Thursday, he is about twenty-four and a Clydesdale cross, and he's got no teeth and his tongue hangs down through the gap, but he's in good condition and he's bright and everything, but Sunday he just got really sick ... He wouldn't put his head down to eat, he'd eat if you held it up near to him, he'd eat ... So he was really, really unwell, so this here, the ritual, the saying goodbye, because Jane, she had just lost her partner at Christmas time and this old horse was his

An issue to emerge from Lynne's story was about her friend's unresolved grief following the death of her partner. Her friend, Jane had seemed to be strong and composed about his recent death and had stayed busy at work yet Lynne was surprised when her friend disclosed that she had expected to have her partner's old horse around a bit longer, a couple of years at least. She had also noticed how tired Jane seemed to be. Jane was scared of being alone, without the transitional emotional being. If the horse died it would be a symbolic loss, as the horse represented a link with her dead partner. The death of horse would remove that link to her deceased partner, so the previous loss of him would be intensified and she would re-grieve his loss with the loss of the horse.

Stable relationships between two beings enrich their lives; however, the loss of the bond caused feelings of intense anxiety. As the women recounted their stories of loss of significant horses in their lives they reminisced about their relationship and were allowed to 're-member' (Belsey, 2002) themselves. Zoe was able to re-enlist her grandfather, to create a plot line that linked his past in carriage driving through to her present. Shared stories between the women participants in this research gave them permission to openly grieve their loss, as grieving or mourning is not generally publicly accepted, socially supported or validated following the loss of a horse. The other women participants recognised and legitimized their loss talking of rituals associated with bereavement. This hidden sorrow called disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1989) may prevent healing and resolution after bereavement. Instead of society intensifying the feelings associated with grief, it should recognise and re-define the significance of the strong woman-horse bond

and support women at a time of loss. The healing community of the focus group enabled these women to grieve and 're-member'.

8.5 Commitment: A lifestyle choice

A commitment to a relationship by investing money, time and energy can be a measure of engagement to that relationship. Investment usually requires a pay-off, and for these women participants their horses have provided them with an opportunity to engage in a growth fostering relationship. The women participants have made sacrifices to share their lives with horses, they have given up so much, materially, and have had their lives changed for the better.

8.5.1 Financial cost

The commitment in financial terms is revealed in Marie's story of her lifestyle choice. The other women participants are fully engaged, laughing as she recounts the stages her family have been through, some recognising that they are following a similar pattern. Marie completes her story comparing the constancy and neediness of her horses with the inevitable growing independence of her daughters. Paradoxically her 'empty nest' is still full, but full of dependant horses, not dependant humans.

Marie: youngest daughter ... oh even at six months, nine months, sitting in front of the TV all she'd watch was the horses, ..., and that was it, you know, one horse unshod, walking to Pony Club. How cheap this is, why do people say it's dear (Gl) to second daughter riding, to single float, to double float, to small truck, to larger truck by selling a good house (Gl) and getting an old house on some land so you can have more horses (Gl), so you end up with eight. And then your children do what all children do and leave, but no body's going to let anyone kill any horses (mmm) so, I'm at home with four large horses .. um

The financial investment associated with horses provides evidence of engagement or commitment to the relationship by the women participants. Two aspects that were raised relate to the initial purchase of a horse and the costs associated with ongoing care of a horse.

Veronica, Sara and Zoe divulge the secret they keep from their partners and Zoe is the only one that explicitly states that she feels guilt associated with such deceit. Veronica implies her partner does not even query the cost whereas Sara has to actively deflect her partner's queries.

Veronica: Just um, only he'd have no idea, he, he would have no idea how much ponies or horses cost these days, or what they cost to be maintained or fed or (yeah)

Ruth: The blacksmith or the vets (yes).

Sara: My husband keeps asking and I keep trying to brush him off (l)

Veronica: Because they are very expensive horses, you know, just even anything (mmm) anything at the moment

Zoe: When I buy horse food, I feel very, very guilty, that I'm buying a bag of chaff or haylage or

whatever, it is, and I'm thinking, I can't tell my husband (l), I've spent another twenty-five dollars when I could have gone and picked some grass or put them in a different paddock, but I do it because it makes a friendship, that there is a set routine (mmm) that the little foal knows, that when I get home, it will get some tucker (mmm). So it builds a bond there (mmm), but is a secret bond that I can't (l) (Gl) elaborate on.

Ruth: Unknown to the husband.

Zoe: Yeah

These three women are in relationships with non-horsey partners. Perhaps a power issue is involved as they rely on their partner's income to maintain their horses so they employ a tactic that works for them. Sara's account below is similar, but this time it is her parents that hold the power, the money. It exemplifies the stories of the other women participants and she recounts her choices with humour, although the words reveal the hardship she must have experienced.

Sara: At Teachers' College, I was lucky enough to be able to talk my parents into letting me take my horse as well, I was not going anywhere without him ... because, I chose to have him there, I ended up with five dollars in my pocket every week (l) and that was it, because I chose to put my money there, and every time I went to buy something, I would say, 'oh that was half a bale of hay' (l) (Gl) ... my parents didn't actually realise how much I scrimped on other things to do that and I didn't want them to have to give me lots of extra money. I just won't buy clothes; I won't go to the movies (l) (Gl). I did that for three years and that's the choices you make.

Sara was emphatic that her attachment to her horse would not be broken by her decision to attend a tertiary institution at a distance from her parental home. Despite financial difficulties the need to provide for her horse's feed was more important to her than extrinsic values related to image, or entertainment. The others laughed with her as they identified with the choice she had made. Like Zoe who guiltily kept a secret from her husband on the cost of her horses feed, or Veronica who hadn't divulged the cost of a horse to her husband, Sara had buffered her parents for three years from the knowledge about her actual financial commitment to the horse in her life and how she had missed out on other opportunities. In the dialogue with Claire below they arrive at a shared understanding that providing for their horses is more important than their own comforts. Sara employs the nurturing discourse in both extracts. Providing food for her horse was paramount. In the extract above she had an inner voice making her feel guilty as she used money to purchase an item that might have been spent on 'half a bale of hay'. In the extract that follows it is implied that she would choose to buy 'dinner for the horses' rather than herself.

Sara: Choosing to spend money on those things rather than your overseas holidays and your big house without land

Claire: Or going out for dinner every week

Sara: Buying dinner for the horses

Claire: And shoes and nice clothes

Decisions these women make to spend money on their horses' care and comfort rather than

themselves is expressed well by Sara below who places this extract as the women 'thinking outside' themselves. In so doing they are not selfish and are engaged in the relationship. They share stories about the various necessary costs incurred in choosing a life with horses, such as fees to the veterinarian for preventive treatment and to the farrier for shoes. Also, the expensive tack and equipment required. As they make comparisons they arrive at a shared understanding that they spend more on horse shoes and horse clothing in a year than on themselves, perhaps realising this for the first time.

Ruth: Um we've got the vet coming to do teeth and tetanus in the week (yes) and that's, I don't know what that will be (yeah) but (yes)
Claire: You think what you spend a year on shoes for the horse (ahh, yes) (Gl). It's huge.
Sara: Yes that's thinking outside yourself isn't it.
Ruth: More than I spent on myself last year.
Claire: And clothing...and accessories (Gl) and
Rosa: Yeah
Sara: Well no, when you think about a \$200 cover lasts about five years
Claire: Yeah, yeah, compared to what we spend on ourselves (Gl)
Sara: It does equate out in some ways
Claire: But shoes get me. I think what I spend on shoes for myself.
Sara: I keep mine unshod as much as I can (l).
Claire: And so little on my shoes (Gl)
Sara: That's incredible, isn't it? When I added up my budget one time, and I had thought that all the hard feed and stuff through the winter was the major cost (mmm) and you go thorough it, oh no, if you've got shoes on one, fifty bucks every six weeks, it's, it (yes) adds up to a hell of a lot of money.
Claire: Sixty
Rosa: Wow, it's gone up now
Claire: Seventy for a new set...Speaking of which, I've got to ring up the blacksmith tomorrow to (Gl) (yeah) to shoes off
Ruth: For the winter?
Rosa: Shoes off for the winter
Claire: Yeah,
Ruth: Oh okay
Claire: It's just we can't ride during the week so it's a lot of eff, it's a lot of expense to maybe get one ride in every other week (mmm), so.. they'll harden, their feet will harden up in about two or three weeks

This dialogue was rapid fired. Claire takes a pragmatic role and will have her horse unshod over winter to reduce costs. She reports that she will ride on softer surfaces to reduce the wear on her horses' feet. Claire may have been going to say effort, but instead talked of cost when she said 'it's a lot of eff, it's a lot of expense'. I know she works long hours and infer that the effort may have been the number of hours she may have to work to pay the farrier, or she may have been referring to the effort required to contact and arrange for the farrier to travel out to her property and remove the shoes from her horse, possibly having to take time off work. This reveals another commitment to be engaged in the relationship with horses that of time and energy.

8.5.2 Time commitment

Apart from the investment of money, the other aspects that reveal a commitment to a relationship are an investment in time and energy to complete mundane chores, daily activities of care. With laughter, the women participants share the negative aspect of completing chores when the weather is inclement or they are feeling ill.

Claire: Some days it's a chore (yeah) and some days it's not, yeah

Ruth: Does the weather have much to do with it?

Sara: Yeah, (l) I was going to say that (Gl). In a storm, it's a chore (Gl)

Claire: I mean like if you're in summer and you go home and it's a beautiful day, you just can't wait to get out there (mmm) and go for a ride

Rosa: Or a cold morning and you've got flu (Gl) and you've still got to go out and see the horse and you think, oh well, you know, at least it's getting me out in the fresh air (mmm).

Veronica: Yes

However, they soon remind each other that the work is worth the effort and the pay-back is positive. For Claire the summer rides are worth the winter chores and for Rosa the chores at least get her 'out in the fresh air'. This is a feeling that Veronica relates to and this connectedness to nature and is expanded in Chapter 11. There are also chores associated with attending horse shows and Marie employs the discourse related to female roles in domesticity as she shares her experience as a mother having to 'build a nest' to continue with the metaphor I used earlier.

Marie: We had to clean the back out so (Gl) we could live in it ... it was inevitably my job to (mmm) once the mats came out then, you know, then it was my job with disinfectant, and Jeyes' fluid and wash the walls down, the floors and spray everything with fly spray, then you put your carpet down and you got your couch which was up on the Luton and formed the bed and pulled out the stove and put the TV and plugged the TV in and got the fridge going and

Ruth: Set up your home

Marie: Yes and you lived like that and then, you know, um, meanwhile the kids were doing the easy stuff with the horses (Gl)

Even though Marie started with the pronoun 'we', which could have included her husband and two daughters but, it was 'inevitable' that she alone fulfilled the maternal role. Later using the third person she extends the scenario to others. I summarise her story, and she justifies the childrens' absence but not her husband's. Later Marie positions the mothers present as '80% you' in her male domination discourse on horse breeding, she assumes a shared understanding when she says 'Je, does that sound familiar' and the other women participants confirm their shared understanding with laughter.

Marie: And you know the big stud fees you pay for the sire, my daughter always said 80% of what your foal is comes from the mare, 80% you, they inherit 80% from the mare, virtually, I mean, give or take, and yet it's the stallions that make the big money and it's the big showy thing and all the rest, but it's the mare that's doing all the work. Je, does that sound familiar

(Gl). Tell me though, as as mothers, you know

Ruth: I'm out (l)

Marie: Yeah, you're out, you're listening.

Marie connects the lived experienced of breeding mares with those of mothers in a world dominated by males of their respective species. Before this can be explored she quickly changes the subject and excludes me, the only non-mother in the group. Financial and time commitment can be described as negative qualities associated with sharing your life with horses. Negative qualities may be considered an oxymoron, but in positive psychology there is a place for them in opposition to enable the experience of the positive to be even more heightened.

The 'need for autonomy' and control was related to these women's control over how they live their everyday lives. Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000) state that individuals who are decision makers with preferences make choices that make them feel fully alive, competent, and creative. These women perceived they had a freedom to make a decision to share their lives with horses, despite financial repercussions. This positive effect of the internal resources available to these women participants could be described as self-efficacy or an internal locus of control. Both are discourses of dominant masculinities and may not have cross-gender validity. The women have managed to achieve a life with horses, often in secret from their male partners and Hoge & Bussing (2004) conceptualise the manageability component of Antonovsky's (n.d.) Sense of Coherence as a resource that has a positive effect on health and well-being and may be more acceptable to feminine theorists.

Sedikides (2005 p. 493) confirms "that close-positive relationships constitute a resource that enables the self to cope more effectively with life's adversities". I posit that this positive affect the woman participants have from their daily interactions with their horse may provide a protection from any possible future illnesses.

Chapter 9 Empowerment

I understand empowerment is about the experience of being encouraged to take action and being personally strengthened by such action and this action inspiring you for further learning and improvement to be the best that you can be. Empowerment is about facing challenges by the setting and achieving of goals, while being thrilled and excited. When discussing the challenge of competition the women participants come to shared understanding that riding horses and specifically riding horses in competition requires courage, creates a sense of adventure and is empowering.

The stories below show how the women participants felt empowered to face challenges by setting and achieving goals. Whilst acknowledging fears and legitimate safety concerns, they were empowered to continue. In the doing of the act they were able to recognise which fears were false and further empower themselves. With success in the action they were encouraged to improve their performance with perseverance, industry and diligence.

Having an internal locus of control and deciding your lifestyle is empowering and horse related activities provide a daily physical work out to maintain health and a general level of fitness. Activities related to horse management has enabled these horsewomen to maintain a level of fitness required to be personally strengthened and empowered physically.

9.1 *The challenge of competition*

When facing a challenge in life, a way to rise to the occasion is to set a goal and then put in place mechanisms to achieve that goal. Competing brings with it both success and failure and each is treated in the same way. Chris's story is told with humility and modesty, emphasising teamwork and the role of others in empowering her to succeed. Her goal a few years ago was merely to have a go at carriage driving, which she achieved through her friendship with Zoe. Then she entered a competition and her goal was to qualify for the National Championship. In the quote below she reveals her cognitive paradigm shift from not being able to achieve to one that would permit success.

Chris: But when I'm out doing the tests for those obstacle courses, when they take you out on the afternoon before hand, you see all the gun drivers and everything, you think I'll never make it, I'll never make it, and I've worked out now you can do just as well and it is, it's a lot of umm, if you can focus yourself as well, you can get there.

She qualified for the National Championship and her next comment reveals that she thought she was out of her depth. Chris's new goal was to attend and complete, and return home with no

injuries to her pony. At this point qualifying was enough.

Chris: I don't want to fail, I just want to get round safely. I do care if I don't complete, you don't win or anything it's getting there.

The next section is an abridged version of her story; it shows the costs to her and her husband in terms of money and time invested to be able to compete so far away from home. During the event Chris recounts that she must maintain her focus and have a definite plan of action as she intimates that her pony reads her mind and anticipates movements.

Chris: I was very nervous, I arrived that night. I had a bad start because I hired a float and the tyres were flat and I wanted to get there before dark. I'd taken time off work and my husband had taken time off work. We reckoned the whole weekend cost us \$1000. ... and I was very nervous. I was on the way up and I looked in my book and I realised I learned the wrong dressage test. And I got that together and I learned my cones on the truck on the way up ... we got through the dressage alright. I met the groom up there I didn't know who was grooming for me. Ron [the groom] talked to me the night before and put me at my ease so it was quite good ... I knew nothing. Anyway, we got through the dressage and I had never thought, but someone, called out 'oh Chris, well done', ... and got first and thought oh hell, that wasn't so bad that was good because my pony anticipates the moves on the dressage test, she thinks she knows what test I'm doing she know diagonals, she knows language ... I talked her through it ... the voice is your command, that's you aid for driving too, and your whip. And no brakes. And then the second day was the marathon and about two-o'clock they take you round this course, which was absolutely freaking, all around the big jumps ... at the National Equestrian Centre round the coffin and all, up the hill. Yes, and we have to learn all these umm, hazards, you know, they only give you that night before to learn them. (whispering) Well I was up all night; I sneaked out of the room so my husband wouldn't know, 'cos if I didn't have it together then I would be useless. But I was panicking, absolutely fretting 'cos I get it wrong and with my pony you can't mess around with her, you've got to give her a definite way to go, 'cos you can't think I'm not sure, I'm not sure because she would be gone... She needs some form of direction. Anyway, I had a very good groom and he helped me through, 'cos I said I'm not sure of two or three of them and I just trusted him to take me through them, 'cos he'd groomed lots, this was a young boy. And we won the marathon and on the third day came the cones and my pony is quite good at cones, very good at cones, ... you've got to be driving her though you can't just let her go on her own, you've got to be on top of her or she might go her own way. That was quite a challenge for me that. So that was my second time out but my first big event.... I couldn't believe that I had won it (quietly) though but really it was a team work, the groom and yeah.

Chris's pony has supported her esteem, and reassured her that she is competent in her chosen equestrian pursuit. She is proud to have won, much to her surprise, the major title at the National Championship and even in the telling of the story she lowers her voice to a whisper as if not believing it herself. Modestly, she also gives praise to the experience of others who had assisted her in superseding her goals. These qualities of humility and modesty are categorised in Seligman's (2004) value of action called temperance. In explaining peak experiences Maslow (1968) provides a theoretical link to explain the duality of feelings expressed by Chris, a self-actualising authentic person. The dichotomy between pride and humility is resolved, he states, by merging them into a one complex, superordinate unity.

Chris: But that was a lifetime goal for me to carriage drive... I've achieved a few goals in the last few years and I've got to think of some more now (l)

Chris, a mother of grown up children, comments below about being able to take risks because of the trust she has in the pony. It could also be that she no longer has the obligations of motherhood and is free to be her authentic self. This contrasts with Zoe who still has dependant children so maternal obligations take priority. When competing Zoe had experienced immediate role conflict as her authentic self competing and as a mother in caring for her child.

Chris: I think I take risks now because I, I've got confidence in the animal that I work with so umm, like going to the National and only been to two different things and I actually won it ...I was very, very nervous ... but I've got full confidence in her and I know she is intelligent and that's given me my confidence (mmm) as well.

Zoe: She is a very capable pony, she knows what is expected

Chris: My pony recognises sound as well, I'm sure she does, she's quite bright, isn't she Zoe?

Lynne: I find that amazing, it must take great courage to change your focus on and do what you are doing, 'cos you haven't done it long by the sounds of it?

Chris: No, I must have some confidence to do it, but it's the pony.

Lynne: And you Zoe?

Chris seeks validation from Zoe, who introduced her to driving as a competitive sport but it was Lynne who provided empowering feedback mentioning the courage required for Chris to stand up to the new challenge in her life. Lynne also acts as a catalyst in this dialogue seeking Zoe's experience. Later, in the interpretative community Chris confided that she had now set a new goal for herself, however, it seems that the heady success of being the current National Champion has overfilled her goal cup and she does not wish to rush to achieve her next goal, but to savour her latest achievement.

Chris: Goal for me is probably driving a pair. But I'm in no hurry

Chris had talked about the relationship she had with her driving pony and the confidence that the pony had given her encouraging her to take action and compete. As well as a special relationship with a horse, courage is needed to compete in events that require risk. The empowering sense of the goal achieved is felt when the round is complete with both horse and rider safe and well. It may be akin to valour and bravery, it is certainly a challenge. I attempt to describe the altered state of consciousness, the peak experience I feel when competing across country and Marie agrees the feeling must be wonderful. Another women participant is so involved in the description she tries to complete Marie's sentence, but Marie corrects her interjection from 'cause' to 'aim' as Marie wanted to establish that a more focused goal attainment was important.

Ruth: Well, I definitely know those times cross country; it was like a dream (mmm) ... it was just a wonderful experience

Marie: It must be amazing to have 800 lb of muscle (yes) and bone actually moving with you

(mmm) or you moving with it, for the common (cause), common aim

Ruth: The one mare that I had my closest horse relationship with, when we used to do cross country, I'd would, I almost know she was looking for the flags for the next jump (yeah). After we were over one jump, she was well, 'where's the next one', right and she would take me (yeah) and I wouldn't have to even point or even push (mmm) because I would just have to sit and be a passenger and it was wonderful (yeah)

Can you imagine as you read this trusting in another being to take you at speed and safely negotiate solid obstacles over a metre high, it is a very transformative experience. In the excerpt above I shared an internal dialogue with my horse and anthropomorphise the question 'where's the next one' as if we are both searching the landscape for the flags which indicate the location of the next obstacle. My verbal account of this notion of one-ness in an optimal or peak experience will be expounded later in the chapter on connectedness but here I describe that feeling of anticipation by the horse described by Chris at the National Championship. I may be controversial here but if you have a trusting relationship with a competition horse, perhaps they do know what you are thinking and that the feeling of their anticipation is the horse actually acting on your thoughts.

Kohanov (2001, p. 38), who uses equine psychotherapy, provides a cogent quote to describe the experience of riding "Keep your body fully in the present and your mind in the recent future. Don't let your past get in your way". The use of 'recent future' was interpreted to provide an insight into the relativity of time, suggesting past and future were interchangeable. The shared feelings and understandings that emerge in this next piece of dialogue cannot be gleaned from a textbook or reading the latest papers published in a psychological journal. In the sport of Eventing, on the cross country phase, Claire, Sara and I try to make the other women participants feel the thrill, to be similarly empowered and as one with a powerful animal as they both negotiate solid wooden jumps at a gallop. It is as if the altered state of consciousness is a reward, a culmination for all the long hours of patient training.

Claire: I think it's good to have a challenge in your life, like with (mmm) jumping, there's always something, I'm scared to do, but I make myself do it and when it goes well it's such a buzz.

Sara: It's like the cross country course

Claire: Yeah, doing cross country

Sara: Petrified, before it starts (l) and once you've gone round, its AHH cool and by the time you're half way round

Ruth: What, what is the feeling like, 'cos that, that, you just can't put in words?

Claire: When it's, when it's going well and its such fun and you get round, you like it you could almost do it again if you weren't so stuffed (Gl)

Sara: It's like a whole adrenaline rush of it and the, .. I guess if you know you have brought the horse to that place (mmm) yourself, as well, (mmm) then it's whole thing of

Claire: It's just a sense of achievement

Sara: It's going so great and we've achieved it, not just 'cos we've achieving it now but we've achieved it from way back here, 'cos you've been working towards (mmm) and building up to it

and all that sort of thing. So, it's not just the event itself, really, is it? (mmm). It's the buzz comes from everything that, all the history leading up to it

It is an effortless flow with grace it is difficult to describe the experience to others without sounding mystical or vague. Words as a form of communication cannot explain this empowering experience, it can only be known in the moment. These peak experiences follow moments of anticipation and fear in the preparation. Claire voices to the others that it would be good to repeat the experience and re-instate the feelings, that is, if she was not so physically exhausted, she says *'you could almost do it again if you weren't so stuffed'*.

9.1.1 Desire to improve

The shared understanding that emerges from the passage below is that the feedback from the judges does empower the riders; it inspires them to take action and to improve themselves and the way of going of the horse. It inspired them to set goals to achieve higher marks at subsequent competitions, providing a measure of self-improvement.

Sara: That's the great thing about Dressage (mmm) because you get so much feedback (mmm) yeah.

Claire: It's good to have (mmm) something to work towards

Rosa: You've got the sheet in front of you showing what you've done and then you can compare them with the last one (mmm)

Sara: Um, on the competing side of it, it is good to have something to work towards

Ruth: Yes, it's that inspiration to do better next time (mmm). Sort of, bringing on young horses (yeah). You go to a Dressage test, you get your sheet (mmm) and you think, oh well can work on that, oh you probably know areas which you could work on. It's, it's to do better, and not, not to ribbons (no), I wasn't a competitive (no) rider, I was doing it for the fun, to do better

Horses provide a wise perspective from which to view success and failure and provide one of Seligmans (2004) values in action, that of wisdom and knowledge. Marie, whose daughters were World Cup class Showjumpers had come to expect success with every outing. Later as they matured they recognised some excellent moments in an otherwise lacklustre round.

Marie: Even at the top competition you go from tantrums because you didn't get a ribbon or you'd knocked a jump down, to saying, come out of the ring all disappointed and, did number four well (mmm) (yeah)

Below the women participants come to a shared understanding about the empowerment that comes with the feelings associated with success in competition. Sara is fully supported by the others as she explains that the feeling of empowerment is heightened if it is due to the relationship, the partnership established between horse and rider committed to many hours of diligent training. The women participants even accept the necessary negative feelings associated with not winning, when thoughts of self-doubt creep in. Despite such setbacks, they agree with

Claire, that returning home from competition there are in a happy mood.

Claire: It's just a sense of achievement

Sara: It's going so great and we've achieved it, not just 'cos we've achieving it now but we've achieved it from way back here, 'cos you've been working towards (mmm) and building up to it and all that sort of thing. So, it's not just the event itself, really, is it? (mmm). It's the buzz comes from everything that, all the history leading up to it

Claire: But, then you negative as well. If you go out and have a bad day, (oh yeah) and the horse goes like crap and you fall off (mmm, yeah, mmm) or, it's just, you know, part of it, you

Ruth: Driving home you feel, what are you (I) doing? (yeah, yeah) (Gl) Its horses!

Sara: Threatening to sell them for dog meat, and (I)

Claire: Ninety percent of the time you drive home after an event you feel good.

Sara: Yeah

Veronica: Even if the horse has gone badly (mmm) you do (mmm).

Claire: Umm, I suppose it

Veronica: I find I do, I went to a local show and

Claire: It depends (mmm)

Veronica: He was so naughty, he was so naughty he was doing little rears about that high (indicating half a metre) off the ground and pig jumps (yeah) and I hadn't ridden him for about two weeks before I went. Oh, he was so naughty (Gl) he was so embarrassing (Gl).

Sara: But you were still happy on the way home?

Veronica: Oh, I thoroughly enjoyed my day, even though I didn't get any ribbons or, I was still very happy, oh well, I wasn't happy with him because he was naughty but I knew it was my own fault (yeah, yeah) yes, because I hadn't ridden him.

Sara: You hadn't ridden him.

Rosa: But you were pleased.

Veronica: And then the next day I went down to another local show and got Champion, so (ohhh) (well done)

Sara: He got it out of his system

Veronica: But it didn't make any difference because both days to me were just ... I was quite, I was quite please with both days.

Sara: I think it depends whether, the bad day, is as you say, as a result of yourself maybe.

Veronica: Yes, it was a result of, oh well if it had been him it would have been different.

Sara: In which case you can, yeah, you can, you can be annoyed at yourself (I) but you don't feel (I) so bad about the horse.

Veronica: I just thought it was my own fault...I never had lessons or anything, and I wished I'd had of now because there is just so much you can learn (mmm)

Veronica describes her horse's 'naughty' behaviour and the other women participants laughed at her embarrassment. This laughter was not aimed at Veronica but at the situation she described as these women participants shared her feelings as they too had experienced such moments; the function of the laughter was to help dissipate her negative emotions in a supportive manner. The collective sigh 'ohhh' lifted any discomfort felt. Competition with horses is a great leveller, when expected success has not been realised, a time for reflection follows which in itself can be empowering as the attribution of the behaviour of the horse is located outside of the horse itself, either in the rider or the situation. Such reflection empowers Veronica to persevere and enter another show. She tells of the success achieved and is praised by one of the other women who says 'well done', which must further empower her. Later Veronica is supported as she articulates that she wished she had lessons as 'there is just so much you can learn'.

In this section I have investigated the ‘need for competence’ related to riding. The women participants have been empowered to improve their abilities in competition. They were intrinsically motivated, able to fulfil their potentialities, and able to seek out progressively greater challenges. To conclude this section, it is not just the winning that can be empowering as not winning can bring a new perspective, a new challenge to face, a new goal to set. The women participants are empowered to achieve again next time out, encouraged to take action as they strengthen their resolve to improve. Improvement in competition is achieved when you face up to the challenge and that challenge might be to overcome feelings of fear. Fear can be manifested in competition and in other activities associated with sharing your life with horses.

9.2 Facing fears: Potential for physical danger

You can be empowered by successfully facing false fears and in the talk below a shared understanding emerges as these women participants become aware of experiencing feeling from their bodies in the moments of heightened arousal leading up to the competition. Sara and I describe the visceral physiological changes that are occurring as we prepare for an event, the effect of the cocktail of hormones provide the ‘flight or fight’ syndrome, that is, the dry [mouth] and having to literally run to the toilet. These false fears dissipate once the rider has started the competition and are replaced by the feeling of euphoria. Claire approaches this discussion at a more cerebral level with cognitive thoughts of self doubt and twice she states a rhetorical question ‘*what am I doing here?*’ Sara’s internal dialogue admits the obstacles are large but her internal voice does not seem to be as overwhelmed. Throughout this dialogue there is much laughter and shared humour as the women participants are reminded of their experiences.

Ruth: But you were saying just before a cross country, are you anxious? I remember, remember thinking sometimes (mmm) before I go cross country (mmm), I think, um just everything was dry and everything was tense and yet as soon as you set off and over the first jump and it (yes) was as one with the horse and off you go and you enjoy the course

Claire: It’s the second or third jump when it’s going...once you’ve got going

Sara: And you walk the course and you look at them (yeah) and it’s a big spreads and ditches, they’re my bogies, and you just look at them and you go ohhh that’s huge

Claire: And you think, what am I doing here?

Sara: And that’s when I really have to run (Gl) ...ah ah ah going to say gone to the toilet three times

Claire: It’s looks so huge, so big what am I doing here (umm – Gl)

Veronica: I’ll never have that feeling because (Gl) I’ll never be going around a jump

Sara: Cross country (Gl)

Claire: Yeah (Gl)

Veronica: ...but we[Dad and I] used to do a lot of mustering, Dad had a run off which was probably nearly five miles from where we lived and we used to do a lot of musters like you’d go for three days (awesome) I use to love that (yeah). It was only sheep we were mustering but, and then we needed to bring them home across the sand hills and (mmm) to be near the sea.

Sara: A good way to see the country.

Veronica listens attentively and admits she cannot relate directly to the thrill experienced in competition but she is prompted to describe similar feelings she had experienced as a child when mustering sheep with her father, Sara supports her with a comment re-connecting us to nature. This feeling of exhilaration can be empowering, however, it is not only the speed or winning that can thrill, even in the strict discipline of dressage it is possible to become excited over a the preciseness of a particular movement that has been practiced in training and feels just right in the heightened experience of the competition, sports competitors call this being in the zone. The desire to repeat this experience and to improve is a motivational factor with horse riding and the women describe the tangible evidence of improvement.

The women participants admit activities with horses can be dangerous and can feel legitimately scared, even terrified but face these fears and continue to put themselves at risk, trusting their lives to their horse. The women participants relieve the tension with laughter when I confront them about the potential danger. The laughter is not because they perceive the situation as funny but because they can relate to it, share the feeling and empower subsequent speakers to continue to expose such emotions in a safe environment. Sara reconstructs her first days hunting below.

Sara: Your own physical safety, well (mmm) yeah, you can feel worried about your safety, without anything actually happening too

Rosa: Yes

Sara: Like when we went hunting (I) on my nice quiet horse, who suddenly wasn't (I) You know, it was kind of like this is not fun anymore (Gl), you know and it's, yeah (Gl). This nice soft mouth turned as hard as concrete and you can't do a thing. Those kind of things are kind of negative, you're anticipating this fun day (mmm) and you think you are going to be safe because you know the horse and you know that, and and it's not

Veronica: So you were scared

Sara: No, not, not, not terribly, not terrified but yeah, enough to think that if we were a bit closer and I could see the floats, I'd be going home now, I can't be bothered with this anymore.

Veronica quizzes Sara about her feelings and Rosa supports her in the choice of mount saying she could not have anticipated her reaction amongst so many other horses and riders moving at speed across country. Then Sara admits that she was anxious and would have finished for the day if her transport were nearer. To ride all day out hunting requires a person to be brave as well as possess a good level of overall physical fitness. The animal husbandry activities related to keeping a horse physically fit for competition also enhances the level of physical fitness of the person who cares for the horse and this will be discussed next.

9.3 For physical health

With the choice of having horses in your life there is the added benefit of related physical

activities to keep you fit and healthy. Having a fit and active body is empowering to enable action without the thought or feeling of pain. The talk between the women participants comes to a shared understanding that horse husbandry (grooming, rugging, mucking out, moving feed, as well as riding) requires physical exertion and maintains strength, endurance and flexibility. Sara is supported by the others as she describes the strength and endurance necessary to care for her horses and Rosa, who has not had horses for a couple of years feels her physical health has declined and admits to increasing frailty, being less flexible than she once was.

Sara: Heaps of fitness, even not from the riding itself (mmm) but by the time you've walked backwards and forwards a few times (mmm) and if you've got a couple hills as well and you're carrying buckets pushing barrows and (mmm)

Rosa: And it's just the getting out every day and having that specific thing to do no matter how you're feeling. I know since I gave up riding ... but it's the going backwards and forwards to the horse. I know I've stiffened up a lot, I'm not, you know, basically I'm not nearly so well in myself as I was when I kept the horse (mmm).

Ruth: But it keeps you fit moving things around (mmm), or keeps you active anyway.

Lynne: Well, I've just bought two bags of feed home tonight and heaved them into the feed bins (I) yeah, so.

Marie: I notice as I'm ageing, that thing that aggravates me most is I can longer pick up a whole bag of barley, which was, you know, like up, get in on your shoulder (demonstrates) get it settled and you were right. Now I've got to

Ruth: Empty and scoop out.

Marie: Empty it out and it's not, it's just an ageing thing, it's and it frustrates me

Lynne: But to look after a horse properly it does take effort and energy and (mmm), doesn't it (oh yes). It's not, even just brushing them (mmm) (yes, yes).

Lynne, in her forties, recounts easily lifting 25 - 40 kg bags of feed which contrasts with Marie who is annoyed that with her increasing age her strength has reduced and she can no longer do physical tasks with ease. I attempt to reduce Marie's negative self comments by suggesting a strategy for dealing with such large masses of horse feed. However, although Marie reflects a word I used, 'empty', she is still despondent, perhaps coming to a realisation after Lynne's concluding remark that much physical effort is required to care for horses and that the task of caring for her daughters four large horses is becoming difficult for her on her own.

In our relationship with our horses we are empowered and being a participant in this research has been empowering as these women make connection with empathetic listeners. By committing to and supporting the story teller the women participants have given power to the storyteller. This is discussed more fully in the empowering women section of Chapter 12. The next chapter reveals how horses provide enhanced connection with other humans.

Chapter 10 Connectedness: To other humans

The three growth promoting qualities of authenticity, engagement and empowerment provided by horses create a synergy of relational health resources. Ryan & Deci (2000) state the self-determination theory requires investigation into three related human needs: the need for competence, the need for autonomy, and the need for belongingness. When these needs are satisfied, Ryan & Deci (2000) claim personal well-being and social development are optimized.

The previous chapters have shown how two of these needs have been met by their horses for the women participants. In riding, in competition and in caring for their horses they have fulfilled the need for competence. The need for autonomy is manifested by their ability to choose their lifestyle as they have been empowered to be their authentic selves with a fully engaged other.

The third and final ‘need’, the need for belongingness may be satisfied in the relationships these women have with horses. However, these women live in a human community and their relationship with horses impacts on their relationship with other humans around them. It has enabled them to strengthen previously existing human bonds, both with relatives and friends. Horses have acted as social facilitators inspiring these women to seek and form new friendships.

10.1 Relatives

In the section below, I will examine some of the dialogue that included talk about the relatives of the women participants. The first relationships to be explored will be with life long partners, extending the section on horse crazy teenage girls and boyfriends from Chapter 7. Then, as mothers, how their mutual interest with horses has enhanced their relationship with their children. Thirdly, the effect of horses in their lives on the relationship with their parents is discussed and finally the connection to ancestors is made.

10.1.1 Partners

The women participant’s described their partners’ involvement with horses from tolerance and acceptance to those who became totally immersed, sharing a mutual interest which heightened the enjoyment and enhanced the relationship. I begin with the formation of relationships and continue with non-horsey partners and finally horsey partners.

Sara discussed when she was dating; one of the criteria for selection of a boyfriend was that he had to show some interest in horses. She recounts a story about her cousin’s selection test and

Veronica adds that when her daughter was at University, she would leave the non-horsey boyfriend to come home to be with her horse. A shared understanding emerged that in this period of their lives these horse-crazy females placed horses above a potential relationship with a partner. To be part of these women's lives the partners had to accept horses were an integral part of her authentic self and either had to choose to become immersed in a life with horses or actively support the lifestyle in terms of providing time and/or finances for the women to continue to have horses in their lives. I realise that I have included the hegemony of masculinity related to 'the provider' but that is the case for some of these women.

Sara: They've got to get on with horses, a, the boyfriends, that's the big test (l) (yes)

Veronica: Well he [daughter's boyfriend] came to a show with us (Gl), he reckoned it was the boring day he'd ever spent (Gl) in his life and he never came again, but she use to come home every weekend, regardless of where he was or

Ruth: Oh right so her priorities were still

Veronica: Her every weekend was at home (yeah)

Rosa: She's got her priorities right

Sara: The boyfriends know where they stand in line though, the horses come first

Veronica: He's always sort of come second in line

Sara: Yeah, my boyfriends always did too (l)...I had a cousin who would take her prospective, someone who thought he was going to be her boyfriend, take them out to her horse

Rosa: See what he was like with the horses

Sara: Stick him on the horse, slap its bum and see if he could stay on. If he did, he could stick around for a while (l)

Ruth: How does your, your partner take it then, 'cos he comes to some events, doesn't he?

Sara: He used to go out trekking a bit, through the forest and stuff (l)

Claire: You took his, you took his horse off him (l) (Gl). You bought him his own horse and then you rode it (l)

Sara: No, it wasn't his own horse, not quite true, not quite. Anyway, he used to go out trekking ...hoon around in and out the trees and stuff and he'd never come off. The first time I took him riding on a borrowed horse he got bucked off (l) twice I think (l) um. So, he's reasonably keen, he quite likes the idea of coming out for a ride, but he is quite busy and when I bought Porky, um, she was as a horse I could put other people on (mmm) and so theoretically for him, but she turned out to be quite talented so I (l) kind of took over (Gl). Not, I mean, as I say he's doesn't get out there very much anyway.

Claire: Wasted on her husband

Sara: So every now (Gl) and again, every now and then, he says 'I'd really like to come out riding' and so well, 'when are you going to get round to it' ... Yes, but he's very supportive.

Ruth: That's good, they have to be, money wise, don't they

Sara: Yes, part of the bargain of being with me. He's lived on a farm and in forests and stuff, so he was quite happy to have land and he's very supportive of me (mmm) having given up full time work to do riding lessons and that sort of stuff and having so many horses there, yes.

Sara admits that her husband provides materially for her passion but I think she would like him to join her out riding. Rather than asking him explicitly she is waiting for him to make the decision to join her 'out there' for a ride. Some tension is revealed when she later discloses that he may not be so comfortable with the time she spends with her horses.

Stella laughs as she discloses to the women participants that her husband does not actively

involve himself with their daughters' horses. He has no interest but does allow them the time and finances to enjoy their equestrian activities. In this extract I explain how my husband shares my passion and I try to understand what it must be like to have a non-involved partner.

Stella: But my partner isn't at all (l)

Ruth: Ahh so how does he cope?

Stella: It's like opera, he said, he can appreciate it but it is not something that he's into (Gl)

Ruth: But he is obviously supportive because he allows

Stella: Oh yes, very supportive

Ruth: Because it is such a time consuming passion

Stella: It is, very

Ruth: For the non-horsey partner (mmm)

Stella: It is, especially because we haven't got land, at the moment, of our own, so there is a lot of travelling involved everyday but, yeah, yeah, but that's um, that's alright.

The final comment by Stella was said quietly as her voice trailed off, perhaps she was feeling the opposite, and perhaps it was not alright that her husband did not share the time she has with her daughters while pursuing their passion. Veronica's non-horsey husband had rarely attended a competition with her when her daughter was competing but has recently shown some interest and has joined Veronica at shows, despite her not requesting his presence. Perhaps his guilt is the lack of time he previously gave to this passion but Veronica infers that he was not welcome and he may well have felt that his presence would have had a negative impact on their mother-daughter time. Although, now it could be that he feels he should be there in the role of her protector in case of an accident or breakdown, as she now travels alone to competitions.

Ruth: Is your partner then supportive of your horses (to Veronica).

Veronica: He, his opinion of people that (Gl) are interested in (l) horses is that they have a gene missing (Gl).

Sara: I think my husband gets a bit sick of it too (yeah), the amount of time they take up (yeah) weekends away (l), but in general

Veronica: But I do admit that after all those years he, he never came to a show with my daughter and I, oh he may have come to one, but we actually preferred it when he didn't come because (l) (yes) it was better and um, although, he has come with me a couple of times this last season. Which I didn't ask him to do. He just felt guilty that I was going on my own (l) (yeah). But um, no he has been very supportive he's never really quibbled about prices, oh we never really tell him the price (l) (Gl).

Sara: Stops arguments, eh (l)

In the interpretative community, Chris adds to the data from Veronica about non-horsey partners becoming involved in horse related activities and reminds herself of her financial commitment and the priorities of committing to a lifestyle with horses.

Chris: I've got a non-horsey husband, but he's been to Championships and all with me, but he is quite selective, he'll go to the National and support me there, which has been quite good and they've um, had him um, doing stewarding and things like that which I never thought he'd become involved. It can stretch your finances a bit; I could have a nice new car (l) instead of what I've spent on horses, in the last two years.

Chris's husband's decision to support her at the National Championships may be derived from the kudos he feels being associated with a winner and in that respect his support is conditional upon her continuing to achieve at the highest level. Chris is surprised he has become involved in her equestrian competitive life and states that he has skills to offer, although she would not want him actually grooming for her. Perhaps too much tension would ensue if he was calculating her times and distances as he would be controlling her round. She obviously does not want him in her gig (carriage).

Chris: My husband would be a very good groom for someone, not me, but someone else he would because you've got to be quite mathematical to work your times out.

Lynne's husband has become fully involved in her life with the horses and actively maintains the land they keep their small and growing herd on. She describes that her husband's interactions with the horses has re-awakened her appreciation of him. After their sons had become independent it was her husband who initiated the decision to change their lifestyle to enable her to have horses in her life again. As she tells the story the other women participants share her surprise and laugh when a moment of doubt crept into her mind about his plans for the use of the land they had bought. She introduces her husband to a life with horses and as she watches him patiently dealing with the horses she again witnesses that nurturing part of him.

Lynne: He wanted to buy some land about seven years ago, we lived in town, I always wanted to come out to the country 'cos I was brought up on farms and um he was a town boy. He suddenly started looking for property, unbeknownst to me to start with and my son came home one day and said Dad's just been to look at some property. I said pardon (Gl), pardon, (Gl) and from then on as soon as I knew he was interested, that was it, we came out and bought five acres (mmm) and um first of all he said 'we were going to plant pine trees', he was joking, I think (Gl), and I said 'no' we're going to have a horse, a couple of horses and anyway from the moment we got those Kaimanawas, he has been involved fully and he just loves them and he rides our big old bay gelding, ...they're so funny together, they're like a couple of silly old fools together (Gl)... they talk away and follow each other round and then my husband leans on the fence and the horse come and puts his head over his shoulder and they just stay there for ages (Gl)...but it's so funny watching my husband interact with the horses when he's never had anything to do with them ...he's got the most patience, he's just brilliant with them, and he's not scared of them, there are times even when I'll back off a bit and I'll see the potential for

Ruth: Danger

Lynne: Some sort of danger, but he just bowls straight in there, and he doesn't see that same, whether it's a female thing or not, I'm not sure (mmm), but he doesn't see the potential for, you know, danger, that I can see and he just bowls in, so it's really good he's interested too otherwise (mmm) it wouldn't be quite the same.

Lynne is happy that he has chosen to fully immerse himself in their new life with the horses. It has both intensified her experiences with the horses and her relationship with her husband. She also raises a gender difference with respect to attitudes to safety. Her explanation is related to the gender discourse, where a wife and mother is safety conscious. It may be that she could not

risk severe injury as her role as wife, to care for her husband, would be compromised. Alternatively, he has not been conditioned like her and does not expect the horse to be dangerous and so 'just bowls ...in' where she has learned to 'back off' in some threatening situations. Perhaps he does perceive the risk and is conforming to the masculine discourse of bravery or perhaps it is linked to mutual trust. He trusts the horses not to injure him and does not perceive the potential danger in his actions around them. The horses may perceive his integrity and honesty as he approaches them with no intent at harm, so they mirror his genuineness and do not react aggressively or defensively, but merely accept him into the herd. I have already discussed this quality of horses to mirror the emotions of humans in Chapter 9.

10.1.2 Children

Three of the women participants, Veronica, Marie and Stella have daughters. Stella's are young girls, whereas Veronica's and Marie's daughters have grown up, moved away but have left their horses at home. Marie and Stella discuss with laughter, their shared experience of preparing their daughter's ponies for competition. They agree that it was an activity they both liked to engage in and had mixed feelings when their daughters' took over the role. Although they were proud of their daughters' learned skill they missed the physical contact with the pony. Perhaps it marked a period of independence as their daughters were relying less on them. For Marie the pleasant memories of her plaiting days would re-emerge when she would discover the elastic bands in the equipment as she was still allowed the more mundane task of cleaning the gear, revealing again the dominant discourse of maternalism.

Marie: I was allowed to plait the horse until they figured out how to do

Stella: laughing

Marie: it and did it better (Gl) and it was like, no I'll do it (Gl) oh you stopped me, I was very proud of my plaiting

Stella: Yeah, likewise

Marie: Yeah

Stella: I enjoy, I used to find it very relaxing

Marie: Yes

Stella: It was the nice part,

Marie: Yes, it was the nice part.

Stella: They could do the washing and the grooming and I'd just stand there and plait them.

Marie: Yeah, I used to like that

Stella: And they got really good, even, even the little one,

Marie: And they get, get, yeah

Stella: By the

Marie: And they get by

Stella: By the end of this season

Marie: They'd be up on fences with rubber bands sticking out their

Stella: They just loved being touched, you know, behind the ears

Marie: And then you go and wash everything and little brown rubber bands come out (yeah) and jam everything (ohh), but I think, that's why I think women do, the relationship is a totally

different one.

As a Pony Club mum, Veronica had shared feelings for horses with her daughter and that bond is maintained even though her daughter is now working overseas. In her daughter's absence she maintains a bond with the horse that links them. Unlike her daughter, the horse is not expected to grow up, become independent and leave home so provides her with a constant dependant to continue to care for now her 'nest is empty'. In the next excerpt she is fully supported by the other women participants as she suggests that her daughter, at twelve, may have lost interest in horses when a much loved pony died but they are able to continue together as '*it [a common interest in horses] kept us going*'. The use of the word '*us*' reveals her own attachment to the pony that died.

Ruth: You keeping him fit, ticking over

Veronica: Well, well he's quite old now, so (Gl) um yes it, yes it does, yes it does give you a bond with them with (mmm) and, and the horses as well...

Ruth: You're were saying that your bond with your daughter was stronger probably because of (mmm) of the horses.

Veronica: Probably was, because she

Ruth: The shared interest.

Veronica: She didn't give up riding, I thought she was going to give up riding when she was about twelve, after this horse died (oh right) (mmm) um and she never did and we fortunately found another one and we actually found another two and we got Todd (l) (right). So, um, yes then I think it did, it kept us going we went to shows, well until she went overseas last year...

The experience raising boys was markedly different. Three of the women participants had sons, Zoe, Chris and Lynne. Lynne returned to horses after her sons had grown up and left home but now enjoys introducing her grandson to her horses. Zoe's partner had had extensive experience starting horses and riding but now he is more interested in introducing his sons to the world of motor-bikes. She had attempted to pair one son with a pony but he only seemed to derive enjoyment from grooming the gelding, preferring to join his brothers and father on motorbikes.

Zoe: I did get one of the boys, um, my fourth son, a pony and I had to (l) work hard to get this because I thought that's what he wanted and we went down and saw this, it was a Shetland (l)... anyway, we got this as a foal and we went and saw it and I said what do you think of little da-da-da and he said, I'd rather have a chook (Gl).

Stella: Well, there you go

Zoe: So, yeah, but he loved it, he loved it, you know, when it came home, oh he was so proud of it but it didn't go past the brushing stage, you know, he, he liked to brush it, but um. Had to wait years for it to grow up and then his legs (shows lengthening) you know (mmm)...but um the motor bikes had a great pull. So all my sons have got bikes and my husband as well.

Stella points out that perhaps Zoe should have been aware that her son did not want a pony, saying at the time he would have preferred a chicken. Her comment '*Well, there you go*' shows the inevitability that a boy would conform to hegemonic masculinities, so why even try. Zoe defends her actions by saying that her son did form an attachment to the pony.

10.1.3 Parents

While talking about family involvement Stella had this to say about the inevitable heritage she is now sharing with her daughters.

Stella: My mother rode as well and I think I followed very much in her footsteps, my history.

No other women participants talked about their mothers apart from Veronica who in this extract actually removes her mother from the horsey aspect of her life. She was raised on a farm and describes some exciting times she shared with her father and their horses

Veronica: we sort of had quite a few little ponies but we used to do a lot of mustering, Dad had a run off which was probably nearly five miles from where we lived and we used to do a lot of musters like you'd go for three days (awesome) I use to love that (yeah). It was only sheep we were mustering but, and then we needed to bring them home across the sand hills and (mmm) be near the sea.

Ruth: Was the whole family involved with that then, the whole family involved?

Veronica: No, just Dad and I. Mum, Mum certainly wasn't involved in anything like that (Gl)

Sara: Yes, musterings good fun

Veronica: Oh, I loved it (mmm) used to love it. Because it was all in the sand country and you can imagine all these lupin bushes and everywhere (yeah) one of the, I always used to have the outside around the perimeter fence but I think you're sort of looking at enormous 400 or 500 acre paddocks (ohh) and then someone else would take the next lupin and someone else would take the next one and we'd all meet back at the house.

The women participants are fully involved with Veronica's description as if feeling the exhilaration themselves, uttering 'awesome' and 'ohh'. She actively positions herself in the discourse as she describes the muster as an activity that requires co-ordination between the riders as they become engaged in the relationship in the moment to achieve a common goal. In reply to my question about the family involvement, Veronica quickly replies that this was an activity that specifically excluded her mother so that she might become engaged in a relationship with her father through their mutual interest.

The next two extracts show how horses can enhance the relationship with fathers. Chris's father cared for her pony when she left home to pursue a tertiary education and Sara's father spent some quality time with her, enabling her to compete, solving her transport problem.

Chris: ...this pony actually had a stroke and the Vet wanted to take her up to the local Veterinary College 'cos they thought her arteries had got calcium all inside (ohh) and my father said 'no, my daughter wouldn't like that', which I wouldn't have, and he hand fed her for weeks, months, and she got up and moved again. She was never one hundred percent but, but through his perseverance, but he used to say 'Oh you girls and your horses, they'll eat you heads off' but when it came to the bottom line, he actually looked after, you know, the pony that taught me to ride, which was quite special (mmm).

Chris is supported by the other women participants as she explains that her father cared for the

pony as she would have done, not wanting to transport an ailing pony to have invasive medical testing. He then lavished attention on the pony to help bring it back to health. She finishes by saying that his caring for such an important pony was 'special' and had enhanced her relationship with her father. Perhaps fathers of horsey women can maintain and enhance their relationship with their daughters by expressing support for their daughters' passion without being overly intimate themselves. Veronica's father is showing he cared for his daughter by caring for her pony. Sara's story below is poignant. As she shares this story of her life she begins to realise how much her father had given up to be with her and her horse.

Sara: I think with the relationships thing too. Um, when I started, I didn't get my horse until I was seventeen and then I started comp, oh, I didn't really compete for a while and bought a float and stuff, and I didn't have my driver's licence at the time so Dad would take me to the shows. Which is quite interesting because I didn't have a really close relationship with my father (mmm) but he would put himself out. I think he started realising to that he hadn't formed a (l) too much of a bond and thought it was his way of kind of making up and contributing to the relationship then (mmm) Because we didn't even have car that would pull the float. I'd bought this single float and we would have to swap cars with a friend and then take the float, and you know (mmm) go to this show. He'd just sit in, oh, he quite enjoyed being a fence judge in the cross country or something, but he'd just sit there with his newspaper or some work from work all day and sit in the car and come and walk the cross country course with me and you know, put up with all my bitching and moaning at the end of the day when it didn't go right and (l) whatever, and yeah, so

Rosa: Well he was being supportive, anyway

Sara: Yes that's right and so that was quite, quite a nice bond too in that we didn't, didn't have a closer relationship in a lot of ways because of it (mmm) as far as intimacy kind of things go, but he was just showing his support and being

Ruth: And he was there for you

Sara: Yeah, so that was quite impressive really

Ruth: That was quite a lot of time

Sara: Yes, it's a lot of time (yes).

Ruth: So does he still get involved now

Sara: Uh, he actually died a few years ago (oh), but the last, um one of the later events I went to before he died was down the coast where he was living at the time and he'd had something else on that day he was going to go to in the morning and then he decided to can that and he came out (oh right) and watched and that was kind of nice, yeah (yeah) That was quite cool.

As she told the story the relationship with her father was enhanced, it was re-evaluated by her. She formed a new and different perspective and now valued his involvement as an expression of his commitment to her. Rosa and I assisted Sara in her re-memembering of her father as she re-framed their relationship in the present confirming that he was 'supportive' and 'there' for her, and gave her a 'lot of time'. It was as if Sara was not fully cognisant of his level of engagement to the relationship at the time, perhaps expecting it as some sort of parental duty.

It is sad that Sara and her father cannot continue to share such moments together, her relationship with her father has been enhanced by the telling of the story and he will continue to have a presence in her memories. A triangulation has occurred as Sara felt safe in her

relationship with her horse that allowed a level of intimacy with her father. Zoe is supported by the other women when she indicates that a shared mutual interest in carriage driving enhanced her relationship with a deceased relative, her grandfather.

Zoe: I always wished I had lived in that period, you know (oh right) Yeah, I'm in the wrong era, that I should have been there with my grandfather

Ruth: The horse age (Gl)

Zoe: Yeah, and so that's why I got into gigs (mmm) so I could re-live a bit what my grandparents had done, mmm

The enhanced connection that horses allow with relatives is important and can be demonstrated by Marie's story about her family. Marie describes competing with the horses in their life were the family glue. When her daughters were competing in the National Show Jumping circuit she describes the lifestyle as a very cohesive pastime, extending and maintaining relationships with 'a very, very close group' outside the family.

Marie: There's lots of fun and our whole family spent every weekend for nearly twenty years (l), I suppose... Yeah, and when, it started in September and didn't finish 'til after Horse of the Year, you know (yeah) sort of, end of March, and um. We were into Show Jumping, it was two, three days and sometimes over Christmas you'd go on the circuit and you'd do four or five shows over three or four weeks (mmm) and you'd learn to live in the horse truck... it's a very, very close group and when you're in competitive riding ... I've sat at a horse show and had eight people on the ramp, all different nationalities, you know, just being the only Kiwi there, there's been competitors from all over the world.

These international riders must have felt a sense of belonging, engaging in a relationship, as they were accepted as part of her family, on the 'ramp' of the truck, which can be likened to your lounge room. This feeling of inclusiveness, extending to individuals outside of the family pervades the world of horses; they are important networks that offer social support. The ability of horses to enhance your relationship with friends is discussed in the next section.

10.2 Friends

Jordan (2000) stated that disconnectedness is a major source of human suffering and healing occurs in connection with others. The women participants stated that sharing horses as a passion enabled them to forge close friendships with other horsewomen, with such mutuality in a relationship supporting each other and providing social cohesion. Horses can enhance the relationship with other humans by creating social groups with a mutual interest which validates and empowers these women. Friends Zoe and I initially met in a formal work place situation and in that situation still share stories about our horses to maintain and enhance our connection.

Ruth: Just as we interact through the day, we'll make contact by

Zoe: Just slip in a horse story

Ruth: A horse story or something

Affiliation to the local Riding Club extended the network of social support for these women and Peterson, Lowe, Aquilino and Schneider (2005) expand an emerging construct of social cohesion to include the idea that community participation includes opportunities for shared emotional commitment and reciprocity. Community groups, such as, the Pony Club and the Adult Riding Club offer a social network in which an individual can thrive. Also, friendships can develop due to a shared passion and they are enhanced by a mutual motivation. In this next extract Marie describes her welcome into the Pony Club world in the 1980s as a non-riding mother.

Marie: I mean, I liked, loved the horses but never rode. I was just um the first time you go to Pony Club and somebody says they're all out to walk a course and you find yourself holding six different horses (Gl) and they are all going, (snort) I don't know about this person there, and it's really, (l) your know, or dear, kids just goes, hi, hold Stella: Yes, never seen the child before, hi hold

Marie: and gives you the reins and then when they see you holding one it's like an invitation, 'stupid mother, you know' and um, no, there's, there's lots of fun and there's lots of, er, our whole family spent every weekend for what, it would have been nearly twenty years (l).

Stella has just entered this world and shared the experiences. She too has been left holding the reins. In the Pony Club children trust a relative stranger as one of their own to care for their ponies, particularly if you are already holding a pony you are probably perceived as competent. Stella agrees with Marie that other families will help transport your horses to competitions.

Marie: Or they, a lot of it to is, is with your kids the first time we got a ride out in an old friend's white truck, up to one of the, the first games day we went to and threw ours up on their hairy, shaggy, little \$600 pony which everybody was still in the thousands then and I said, 'go and have fun' (mmm)

Stella: Yes, that's what they do and

Within the Riding Club special friendships can form that are enhanced by mutual encouragement to improve their riding. The origin of Claire and Sara's friendship is revealed.

Claire: We met at school, we didn't have that much to do with each other (yeah) and then

Sara: So we really became friend through the horses.

Claire: Yeah, yeah

Sara: After leaving school...and then, yeah, because Claire and Jen were just kind of hacking round the roads and out to the beach and that sort of thing, and I started encouraging them to come to Riding Club and suddenly they bought horse floats (l)

Claire: Yeah, that was it we were away (Gl)

Sara: No stopping them (l)

Their enhanced relationship led to Sara inspiring and empowering Claire to become more involved in the local Riding Club. They now work with a small team that organise local equestrian events and provide experiences for others to enjoy. Their friendship is enhanced by

their participation as community citizens. Similarly, Chris and Zoe's friendship is enhanced because of their mutual passion for carriage driving. They too organise events for others to benefit from. Regarding the 'need for belongingness' Peterson et al. (2005) state that empowerment is a social-action process developed through active, meaningful participation in a community. These women participants felt empowered by their active participation in a local community group organizing and taking part in competitions. From the contemporary field of positive psychology Peterson and Seligman (2003) would include community participation as a form of social responsibility which they categorise as citizenship under the banner of Justice, one of their six 'values in action'.

Chris: When Zoe and I started off, Zoe used to drive my pony because I couldn't drive. She helped teach me drive. Umm we were just doing casual driving together we were just doing it for fun, we were not competing and then the bug got me. But I still do it for fun, its more fun than competition for me.

The mutual passion for horses has led to the formation and maintenance of a number of friendships between the women participants. Alliances like this, based on common interest are classified as affiliations by Weiss (1998) in his taxonomy of relationships. Claire articulates the mutual motivation experienced in this affiliated relationship.

Claire: We sort of, we sort of spur each other on towards doing things (l)

The shared understanding of camaraderie at competitions emerges in the dialogue below. Initially Sara feels apart from the other experts as she describes her introduction to competitive life as an adult. All are fully engaged in her telling of the story which generates much laughter.

Sara: Yeah, yes it's quite fun, 'cos at first, especially when you're first start getting into something like the Dressage or Eventing or anything and you look at all these people who seem to have been doing it for so long (Gl) and they look so confident and you're going oooo (Gl) dashing off to go to the toilet for the third time before you go and do your cross country or something (l) but then, like you say by the time you've seen those same people (mmm) at a few things (mmm), you don't feel quite so shy and quite so underneath them all and yeah you start making friends (mmm) and they, oh, I see you again (mmm) and you don't know them from a bar of soap to start with but you just

Rosa: That's the beauty of the Riding Club

Sara: You just start talking to them

Veronica: And everyone is genuinely, genuinely interested

Sara: Yeah

Veronica: On how you are getting on (mmm)

Sara: Yes, it's usually horse things are very friendly, aren't they? (mmm) Generally, they don't seem to be so head to head competitive like other sports

Ruth: Like they would, like they would lend you a girth (Gl)

Sara: Yeah, that's right.

Veronica: Or a saddle (Gl)

Sara: Yeah, all those things, I've thought about that at horse competitions. I think, I've heard someone comment that, at horsey things they're not very good at standing round watching other people do their thing (mmm). I guess because by the time you've warmed your horse up for half

an hour for your Dressage test and you've done your test and you just want to get them (mmm) sorted again

Claire: Yeah, you don't really, you sort of watch the people you know, your friends

Sara: But you do, yeah, you do try and keep an eye out (mmm) and you always have a look at the scores for everybody (mmm) and congratulate people that you know (mmm) and how did you go and all that. I think it is still a really supportive thing (yes) even if you've not all watching each other all the time (mmm).

This dialogue continues as the women participants co-create an understanding that in competition horse people actively encourage others to achieve unlike other sportspeople that are 'head to head competitive'. Sara, Veronica and I provide evidence that equestrians will even lend vital equipment to enable their competitors to complete an event. Sara attributes the reluctance to watch others compete to a third party and explains it by remaining in the third person and putting the horse's post-competition care before watching friends compete. Continuing in the third person she acknowledges that relationships are enhanced as friends offer support. This support occurs even when two horsewomen find themselves in a social group which is not based on the passion of horses. Such social 'outgroups' will be discussed next.

10.3 Social 'outgroups'

These women participants agreed that when you meet others in an out-group situation you will inevitably talk about your horses if you feel free to be your authentic self. Mentioning you have horses in an out-group may make a connection with others that have a similar passion. As you share common stories, inevitably friendships develop. Chris describes how her authentic talk of horses was the 'key' to starting a new friendship.

Chris: When you are in those outside circles, though, there would not be so many horsey people, so you are outside your group, so that is one of the key. I went to a University last year we were from all over the lower North Island and we had to interact with different people and find out their interests and I found another lady (l), she didn't like the horse but she had a daughter that had a Welsh one, so that was a start.

Zoe: Horses are a conversation piece for a start; I tend to be able to sniff out horsey people in the room.

It is interesting that Zoe uses the term 'sniff out', others may have used seek/find or heard, relating to their primary sensory modality. Perhaps Zoe finds the primitive sense of smell important; she had previously mentioned the emotional resonance of a horse's smell evoking pleasant childhood memories of previous attachments. Chris describes how she forged a friendship with another horsewoman at an evening class unrelated to horses.

Chris: I'd taken a year off teaching to go to Art School, because that is one of my passions, because if I've got my art and horses, I feel balanced. [In the art class] we had to paint this composition with colours in it and the tutor was absolutely rude to me, he said "You never, ever paint two brown horses together" ... Well, I was devastated, 'cos I thought I'd made quite a

good job of the horses that I'd painted. Well, I told my friend of mine, well she was um, I didn't know that well but she was in our class, well it turned out that she had racehorses and that's how come I actually got back into horses. She wanted me, she knew someone that wanted their horses exercised, so out of a negative came a positive for me, (mmm) mmm,

This makes known how Chris feels complete when horses are in her life and the support received from others in the horse community. The horsewoman class mate contrasts as a supporter, to boost her morale, against the attack of the 'rude' tutor.

In new social groups the women participants actively monitor their horse-talk as their conditioned persona has a critical internal dialogue to prevent social rejection by over-indulging. Chris describes a recent holiday and her need to make contact with a horse, which conflicted with her having to monitor the reaction of her fellow travellers to her horse-talk. Her conditioned persona feared social rejection being labelled as an obsessive.

Chris: I've just been on this trip to China ... I hardly saw a horse, the rest of the party thought I was obsessed, which I'm not (nl)... [in this village] all these horses around and I was wanting a ride...

She attempts to see the point of view of the other tourists as she talked about horses but is dismissive of the idea that she is obsessed. Perhaps Chris's nervous laughter reveals an anxiety about such a disclosure. As we interact outside our horse circles we actively monitor our disclosure about our passion in case it will not be viewed in a positive way.

Marie: I don't think people who don't have horses understand people who do (mmm) because

Lynne: No, I don't either

Marie: They think you are mad (mmm).

The level of support these women received from the other participants reveals an understanding of the daily predicament we face dealing with non-horsey people who do not understand our passion and may consider us to be abnormal. To protect our authentic selves we prefer the projection of a false self in these circumstances. The focus group discussions in this research provided an opportunity for the women participants to be their authentic selves and new friendships have emerged. Even in the temporarily formed discussion groups in this research, the women participants found a genuine and supportive audience that might be described as a curative audience (Stocker, 2005).

The inner growth experienced by the women participants did not occur in isolation as the growth-fostering relationship they describe with their horses facilitated and enhanced further relationships they experienced with other humans and with nature.

Chapter 11 Connectedness: To nature

These women participants provided evidence for the relational efficacy provided by their horses. The horse is perceived as being emotionally present, attuned, and authentic within the relationship, empathically allowing the women to be their whole and authentic selves. The quantitative tool in this research modified from Liang et al.'s (2002) relational health indices for human studies did not provide an item to measure the powerful theme that emerged from the qualitative part of this investigation, a connection to the beauty in nature.

Sharing our lives with horses enables us to a direct connection with nature embodied in an animal. Horses allow us to experience the Earth's biological rhythms, the cycles of life. Finally in this chapter I will discuss the optimal experiences of some, where there are no boundaries, a spiritual essence of one-ness.

11.1 Connection with horses

In this section I show how the horsewomen marvel at the beauty of horses and immerse themselves in an intimate sensory awareness. Also, they describe the pleasure from merely observing the form and movement of their horses on an everyday basis.

11.1.1 The beauty of horses

Around horses you are in the presence of very large, powerful animals. Even the shape of them excites, especially the magnificent sight as they gallop across a paddock. Marie describes in awe, watching a herd of large draught horses and places herself in the scene as another horse, perhaps wanting to be as one with them, in some way connected. She chooses to use the word 'trot', a gait of horses, and not jog, the human equivalent when she described her movement.

Marie: I think probably one of the most impressive moments was when we, my husband decided to buy a Clydesdale... this Clydesdale mare was for sale, and ... [the vendor] said 'oh pop up to the top of the hill and I'll be with you in a minute', so we trot up the top and we stood there, then all of a sudden the ground started shaking, it was like that (demonstrates hoof beats) and up this hill came probably ten (ohh) of the biggest Clydesdales, they were black and white, tossing their heads like

Zoe: Oh beautiful

Marie: Like foam on the sea (Gl) their heads were going and their tails (ooo) and they were wheeling and I'm going uhhh and the ground was literally (mmm) just shaking (mmm) from the sheer weight of these (mm) absolutely beautiful horses and I just, I was gobsmacked, I just

Ruth: It would have been a magnificent sight, wouldn't it? (mmm)

Marie: I'll never, ever forget that, I don't think (mmm) (yeah)

From the supportive 'oos' and 'ahhs', the woman participants who were listening to Marie,

were fully engaged in her description as if re-living it with her, the moment that was so impressive, adding 'beautiful' and 'magnificent' to the scene. This description involves transcendence, one of Seligman's (2004) values in action, that is, the ability to appreciate beauty. Marie uses the metaphor 'like foam on the sea' to describe the manes and tails of a herd of galloping horses. Lubart & Getz (1997) believe that metaphor provides a means of expressing emotion-based associations and in this way she emotionally connects the other women participants to the scene she witnessed.

Women who love horses appreciate their beauty. Zoe speaks of Chris's pony below and Chris proudly agreed she was special.

Zoe: She is just grace, beauty, eh.

Chris: Mmm, she is a bit different

The beauty of horses is not confined to just the sight of them for such horsewomen, even just knowing they had passed by is enough to excite and give a special tingle. Such an experience is special, the somatic energy generated and felt cannot be acquired through cultural conditioning or knowledge based on learning from texts.

Lynne: It's just the shape of them and the

Marie: The power and the beauty of them (yeah)

Lynne: It's just everything, the smell of them (l) (Gl), even their horse poo, I don't mind the smell of their horse poo (Gl)

Ruth: Just to talk about it (Gl)

Zoe: Yeah, well just the sight of seeing a poo when you didn't own your own, oh there's a horse been along here (excitedly) (Great Gl).

Lynne: Especially in town

Stella: Yes, especially in town, you do get that, don't you.

Zoe You know there's a horse had been around (yeah).

Lynne: I love their soft noses, I love breathing into their nose (mmm), I love the (mmm), just the, oh, I don't know, I don't know what it is, it's just everything about them.

Ruth: It's also a lot of senses, sensory awareness; it's not just one sense. It's not just touch, its smell, its hearing (mmm), it's a whole cacophony of senses at once, horses.

Chris: I even like the sound of shoes on the road.

These last excerpts of multisensory consciousness shows a focus outside the self and how the mere presence of horses having been in a urban landscape can remind horsewomen of a possibility beyond concrete and tarmac, and make a connection to a beautiful animal, part of the wider world, part of nature.

11.1.2 Socio-sensory awareness

Working with horses requires a great deal of body to body contact and allows a constant stream of information from all the senses, perhaps reactivating our emotional and intuitive mind. So it

seems horses may open women to feelings that are indescribable but nevertheless empowering at a non-cognitive level. There have been many references throughout the thesis to this liminal awareness and the extracts below extend to olfaction the primal sense of the emotions.

Sara: They do have a nice smell and it's one of the few animals that that sweat. Horse sweat is actually quite nice too, the smell of horse sweat isn't bad like (l) ours

Ruth: After a competition and you are washing them down

Sara: Yeah

Claire: Only when it's not in your blankets and then it

Sara: Yeah, it's stale

Claire: Yeah, and bacteria have grown

Sara: Yeah, but a sweaty horse smells quite nice

Claire: Yes, it's not an unpleasant smell

Sara: No

Claire: But non-horsey people find it is, oh man you stink of horse

Sara: Yeah, you might stink of horse but the sweaty horse itself

Claire: Yes

Sara: Smells good

Zoe describes the pleasant childhood memories evoked from the smell of a gelding.

Zoe: A few years ago um I got a gelding for one of my kiddies and it just took me right back, right back to when I got my boy when, when I was twelve, because he was a gelding and they have a different smell

Marie: if you were lucky you got to hang on the back and smell, (Gl) breathe them (yes) breathe them in

Ruth: an explosion of senses, isn't it

11.1.3 Women watching horses

Apart from dealing with our horses in close contact every day, they also provide a spectacle of unfolding life before us as we take time out of our otherwise busy lives just to stop and experience the moment as we watch our small herds interacting in the paddock. However, recent research on inactivity (or procrastination) links this behaviour to the evolutionary theory and energy expenditure. Ginestet (2005) proposes inactivity is a survival means of employing energy conserving strategies that links us to our idle past. Evidence of a focus outside of the self to nature occurs when we observe our animals like trained scientific, ethologists in the field, making mental notes of horse behaviour.

Stella: I have to say we, we graze ours, um, with quite a number of others, so they are in quite a herd, which has been real, which I didn't actually want to do to start with because it does, it stops quite a bit of the bonding with (mmm) me but at the same time it's really, like you said, incredibly interesting to watch them. We've got, there's now two geldings but there was just one and he was it and my, and my mare was the boss girl and they had it all sorted, you know, and to watch them all (mmm), and how they interact and how, obviously and the ponies settled into it really well because they obviously came from a herd and then they are quite distinctive.

Stella describes the hierarchy and the individual personalities of the horses, the leaders, the bold and the curious. She intimates that the Kaimanawa ponies adapted well into the herd structure as they must have known about herd social dynamics from their previous, feral existence in a wild, free-running herd. She is fully supported by the other women participants and goes on to observe and describe social learning taking place as a new herd member imitates her peers.

Stella: The other thing that I did with my first one that I got was that she learned off the domestic horses (ohh). I put her out, she came and she stayed in the yard for two weeks, um, but she didn't know what to do with hay, she didn't know what to do with feed (ahhh) she had no, wouldn't touch it, nothing, so we had to feed her fresh grass, (ohh), you know, through the, through the yard but after a couple of weeks she went out with my horse and she learned off them, so (mmm) she'd watched them eat out of a bucket and then after a couple of days she had a go (mmm), you know, um, it was, it was an interesting to watch, she really did watch them (mmm) and 'oh that must be right' (mmm) and she did it.

Stella's audience was fully engaged with her description and is fascinated at her telling of the story as she was at experiencing it. It intrigues us to watch how our horses interact with each other. As so often happens when humans describe animal behaviour, Stella has given a voice to her perplexed pony. She has anthropomorphised thoughts onto the pony with the words '*oh that must be right*' as it solves the problem of eating concentrated feed out of a bucket. The next group of women participants reach a shared understanding that allogrooming amongst a group of horses reveals the social dynamics of the herd.

Sara: [grooming] is quite hierarchical in the paddock too, it is quite interesting, you go and take all their covers off and see who pairs up, sometimes if I've got four in a paddock, two will pair up and the other two won't scratch each other they'll just stand round waiting (l) for their turn with one of the other two (Gl), it's really funny...you get one that will groom every horse but none will groom him.

Claire: Or they will start and get in position and start scratching and they'll start biting and it will get vicious and then that's it.

Sara: It's funny trying to watch them have a three-way scratch too, none of mine have quite yet learned to stand in a triangle, I've been waiting to figure out they do in a triangle and all scratch each other, but you'll have two like this (indicates parallel and opposite) scratching each others' necks (mmm) and a third will come up (l) and can't get in, so it starts scratching the loins of one of the other ones (Gl) and stands there saying 'no-one's doing me'. I've got a photo of them doing that, it's really funny, 'oh I'm left out'.

These shared stories about horses grooming bring much laughter as the women can imagine the episodes described. Claire also employs the technique of anthropomorphising in the telling of her story. As Stella, she speaks for the submissive horse in the herd giving voice to the other.

Sara shares the invigoration she feels while watching her herd galloping free around a paddock and is initially countered by Claire who gives an exceptional circumstance, which Sara agrees with and incorporates into her story. Claire now shows support for Sara by using reflective speech that is, repeating the exact words Sara had just uttered.

Sara: I love watching them tear around the paddock, it's so scary as well

Claire: Except in winter and they are ripping up the grass

Sara: Oh yes and I stand there going you mongrels ... but now that we've got safer fences, I don't mind as much. You let them into a new paddock and they all tear around, buck and kick

Claire: Buck and kick

Sara: And spin, they'd never dream of doing any of it when you are on their back. But it is really neat to watch and my husband just stands there and says 'oh doesn't that scare you and freak you out'. Well kind of, it only freaks me out because I think they might go through a fence, but they are just playing.

Ruth: I love to watch them galloping too. In the UK I thought it was due to a sense of freedom as they did it when first put out in a field after being in a restrictive stable. But in New Zealand the horses are in paddocks all the time I wondered why they still rushed around when put into fresh paddock.

Sara: They always run around when you move them ... it is kind of a sense of freedom, free out of this paddock maybe and sometimes I think they are not supposed to be in there (Gl). If you just open the gate and let them through ... and they dive through the gate before you can shut the gate and 'oh yippee I got through' (l) (Gl)

Claire: I was reading something or there was something on TV and they reckoned that when in the wild a horse going into a new area if it's doing it at a run, if there's any predators it's got a better chance of getting away 'cos it's at the run (mmm). Their theory was that a horse does that when entering a new paddock, if it hits it at a run

Sara: And it's kicking

Claire: And there is a predator it has a greater chance of getting away.

Sara: And if they're always spinning then a predator is not going to be able to jump on them

Sara and Claire support each other again when they co-construct an explanation for my observation. At first Sara supports my explanation concerning freedom, then adds an anthropomorphic reason, again giving them voice almost as if they are getting away with something they should not do, like naughty children. This explanation brings much hilarity and finally, Claire posits an evolutionary theory which she modestly attributes to a third party. This is accepted by Sara as she cites behaviour as evidence to support it.

11.2 Connection with nature

As lay ethologists passively observing horse behaviour we are perhaps apart from our horses and their part in nature, however, on occasions we may be active participant observers as they lead us directly to experience nature. The talk below illustrates how the relationship between horses and the women participants is enhanced while out riding in the country or on beaches. They experience climatic conditions, wildlife and untouched places reconnecting them to nature and the annual cycles of life, such as, noticing which trees are flowering, or that it is blackberry season again. Autumn is a time to ensure the harvest is in and there is enough food for the following year. There is a shared sense of satisfaction knowing the barn is full of sweet smelling hay and the bins are full of barley.

Chris: I quite enjoy it, going out, seeing the trees and that (mmm).

Marie: But isn't it a good feeling when you get the hay in (mmm) and you know the whole cycle of the year starts getting the hay in and making sure you've got the barley and the hage (mmm) and you've got the paddocks locked up and it's all part of this bring in the sheaves, or something, it's all part of a great big cycle

Lynne: And it's nice to know you've got that barn full of hay full (mmm) isn't it.

Marie: Yes

Lynne: Ready for winter (yes), the feed for the (yes).

Claire: I find it satisfying to get the hay in, 'cos I know it's there (yeah) for the following winter. I was quite panicky this year 'cos with all the bad weather, and it was rotting in the paddocks and time was getting on.

This passage reconnects some of the woman participants to earlier generations and the vital importance of the rhythms of the earth to ensure surplus food is stored. Claire shares this sense of satisfaction and admits that it has been a worry this year due to inclement conditions.

Although hay is only available in summer, the other constituent of a horse's diet, the concentrated form of energy in oats or barley, is now available all year round from feed merchants as pre-mixed feeds. However, this prompted some childhood memories for Stella.

Stella: Oh, I was thinking of the barley, because I can remember, um sort of, it was quite a significant change when I got back into horses, now all these beautiful pre-packaged foods, but, yeah, every winter, the start of winter was when we nicked Mum's preserving (l) pan and had the barley boiling (Gl). It boiled constantly the whole winter and the whole house smelt of barley and she was sort of huh. It never changed.

The final comment '*It never changed*' was important for Stella, reminding her of constancy from her childhood. A paradox when considering the change associated with rhythms of life and the connection with nature exemplified in the earth's rotation. The seasonal changes are experienced as daylight hours become a premium during the winter months. All the chores, thoroughly rehearsed each day, have to be concentrated into ever shorter and colder days. Diurnal cycles are experienced with the climatic changes affecting activities, from the early morning check to see all is well, to feeding and rugging during the colder months.

Similar to ecofeminists in the third wave of feminism these women participants have rewoven the nature/culture duality (Mack-Canty, 2004). The women participants describe a connection to nature through their horses, and according to Mayer & Frantz (2004) such connectedness is an important predictor of subjective well-being. The ritualistic cycle of caring behaviours that daily, seasonally, and annually link these women participants to their horses also connects them to the constancy in the environment that helps maintain physical and emotional health. Katcher (1983) posited that repetitive cyclical activities that sustain a sense of self and remind us we are part of the dimensions of permanence and stability of nature. Time is taken when possible to just stop, watch and listen to immerse in a socio-sensual awareness.

Zoe: Oh, I love the sound of munching
Lynne: It's a nice noise isn't it? (mmm)
Marie: When you go over and they are munching their hay
Marie: That sound (mmm)
Lynne: I love it
Marie: And it's all quiet and there's just the flick of the tail and munch (mmm) yeah. No, I love that.
Ruth: You feel safe
Stella: It certainly shows they are contented
Ruth: Contented yeah
Marie: It's sort of, you have a sense of satisfaction (mmm) you're days nearly over, you've done all the right things that you could do (mmm) and ... it's another cyclic thing, isn't it, it's part of your day (mmm) umm, you get up to do, to let them out or whatever you're going to do and you end the day by giving them a feed, giving them love, knowing they are warm, fed (yes) and then you go inside(mmm) (yes).

The dialogue between the women participants of this focus group come to a shared understanding as Marie is fully supported by the others. It emerges that there is a sense of quiet peace associated with a group of grazing horses. The other focus group also talked at length about this and tried to make sense of why it was so rewarding and peaceful.

Sara: You feed them all and then you just sit on the hill (Gl) it's so nice at dusk, you sit on the hill and you can hear them munch, munch, munching and it's half dark and they can only just seen you and you know
Claire: It's so peaceful
Sara: Yep
Claire: Sun's just very faint
Sara: And down the slope you can see the mist rolling in as well. You can sit there for a bit and actually see the mist (mmm) coming in across the paddock (l) yeah.

Horses are prey animals and if they are contently grazing, then there are no predators around and all is safe. I wonder if it is this sense of peace that the observing humans are allowed to feel part of. Perhaps by allowing us access to the herd, by including us by proximity, they are sharing with us their complete state of relaxation. The ability to focus outside is important and the woman participants feel a strong connection with horses as sentient beings and beyond, a connection with nature, reminding us we are part of a larger whole, creating a synergy, a *Gestalten*.

11.3 *The phenomenon on one-ness: An optimal experience*

This feeling of empowerment by being at one with an 'other' gives vitality to those that experience it and I use Marie's carefully chosen words from earlier '*it must be amazing to have 800 lb of muscle and bone actually moving with you or you moving with it, for the common aim*'. The following dialogue with the woman participants in an interpretative community shows Zoe and Lynne reaching a shared understanding that was evident between Chris and

myself. Zoe had difficulties in understanding this phenomenon and needed to rely on concrete examples and scientific explanations about thoughts causing small tensions in muscles. Lynne finally says she may have had such encounters with her horse as she begins to understand it might be something like the unique relationship with a long time partner. That experience of nonverbal human interconnectedness, of an intuitive rapport that denies formal logic and cannot exist in syntax. Sorenson (1996) describes this sensory experience as liminal consciousness.

Chris: Sometimes I've said to other horsey people, sometimes have you ever felt like you're one, you are of one (mmm). It's a moment, you don't go out for it to happen, but sometimes you are like of one mind.

Ruth: I've had that competing and um I use to do endurance and do forty miles, you couldn't see anybody else (mmm) and we would be of one, we'd be moving at a lovely rhythmical trot.

Chris: Its here (pointing to head). I haven't gone out to get it, not many people will have experienced that, would they? Because I've talked to people about it and they sort of look puzzled when I say.

Zoe: Is it a place, is it environment?

Ruth: It is like a peace (mmm) a peace comes over. A warm sort of feeling.

Chris: No, I can't actually describe it in words. It is like you are of one mind(points to head). You're thoughts are all of one, you're whole being is one. It's a, I don't know about peace. It's not to do with the environment, I don't think.

Lynne: Is it more of a spiritual.

Chris: Mmm, mmm, yes, I think so.

Ruth: A magic thing.

Chris: Yes (mmm). I've talked to some people, not many, but they have looked puzzled at me when I have talked about it.

Ruth: When you say of one mind, I can remember doing some practice dressage test where I would think canter and then we would be cantering (mmm), yet I did not give the aids, I just thought it.

Chris: Yes, yes.

Ruth: I tried that later and I could actually just think, perhaps my body slightly tenses

Zoe: Your body must tense.

Ruth: I think this is quite a powerful thing. I haven't had it with another horse.

Lynne: It sounds like telepathy.

Chris: Yes, yes.

Lynne: I can understand that.

Chris: But it was her probably being more receptive too, I felt, because I wasn't doing anything great, I was just exercising, I wasn't asking much of her (mmm) it was like she knew what I was thinking, it was more. It's happened two or three times, I haven't had it with other horses.

Ruth: And that's a mare, as well, isn't it?

Chris: Yes.

Ruth: And mine was with a mare... You (to Lynne) were talking of your mares trusting you more than the geldings.

Lynne: I felt that with her to a certain extent, it's a bond, it's a thinking alike, it's knowing what. It's like a husband and wife knowing what each other are thinking of, or finishing each other's sentences for them (mmm). It's an awareness (mmm) really.

As a rider I describe times when I felt in complete harmony with my horse. In competition or training I had to concentrate on a clearly defined goal as I was challenged to use my skills to the best of my ability. My whole being was fully absorbed in the moment, free of the past and of the future, thus free of inhibitions, self doubt and mundane daily stressors. It is a marvellous sense

of one-ness, a transcendence (Seligman, 2004) occurs, expands boundaries and time becomes meaningless, while I simultaneously felt both excited and peaceful. Happy.

These mystical or magical moments are a form of transcendence that is rarely reported as it is so difficult to put the experience into words. This passage reinforces my earlier notion of horses being receptive to human thoughts and acting on them as if in one mind, in the moment. Chris believes this is a form of telepathy requiring a receptive horse, and a trusting relationship. For Chris, Lynne and I these trusting relationships were with mares. Women who experience such a phenomena are unlikely to talk about it to others with a fear of being ridiculed in some way, Chris said she had tried in the past but her audience was less than accepting. In this interpretative community the woman participants were fully engaged, patient, open and non-judgemental. They were respectful of Chris's inner wisdom allowing her to connect with those inner feelings. The community of women were fully engaged in trying to understand the concept of emotional resonance between two participating consciousnesses. That elusive phenomenon of one-ness is so overwhelmingly empowering that if you have been lucky enough to experience it you will want to repeat that experience - that experience of a calm serenity.

Csikszentmihalyi (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001) describes such experiences as Flow, a state people enter into when fully immersed in an activity for its own sake. He adds that a sense of time passing is lost and as skills are used to the utmost. A great feeling of satisfaction and serenity occurs. The women participants shared their stories of experiencing Flow when involved in activities with their horses. They were completely involved in the activity and focused on the present. This dynamic structure of optimal experience occurs in the daily lives of women interacting with their horses. This preferential lifelong activity has a high level of intrinsic motivation, involves high environmental challenges, enough to require active engagement, it is matched by the personal skills used in dealing with horses, which promotes satisfaction in their use. It requires deep concentration, involvement, enjoyment, control of the situation, and immediate feedback is provided by the horse. This is not a new phenomenon to psychology, when discussing peak experiences Malsow (1968, p. 102) stated that the individual "feels more integrated ... more at peace, more one-pointed, more harmoniously and efficiently organised with all his parts functioning very nicely with each other, more synergetic".

This thesis on woman-horse relationships has illuminated the way a group of women have acknowledged the significance of horses to structure their lives. Also it applied feminist insights about how gender structured their world. According to Birke (2002) as our lives are contextually situated within human society and within a society of animals, feminist theory should abandon its separation from the rest of the living world. She adds that we all share in the co-creating of our world and puts forward a notion of theories based on intimate familiarities.

Chapter 12 Discussion

Relationships with horses have provided a consistent source of support for these women participants, a resource in their everyday lives that maintains and enhances their health status. This thesis offers a bricolage. As a bricoleur I have employed a blending, bending and blurring of traditional paradigms. To gain a more complex understanding of the intricacies of research design multiple historiographical perspectives have been constructed, co-constructed and reconstructed by these women participants as they interact with their horses in their everyday lives. With diverse theoretical and philosophical understandings and divergent methods of inquiry in the act of research I have provided insights to a better conceptual grasp of the complexity of the relationship web between a healthy woman and a horse, a knowledge lacking in mainstream health psychology research.

As a bricoleur the choice I made to blend genres was a risk for me, I felt I had to undertake some quantitative data collection because I felt safe with numbers and inferential statistics, however, with my experience with horses I knew that the research question could not be served best by simply reducing a women's authentic self with horses to a number, despite the use of a reliable and valid instrument. The quantitative results from the questionnaire were inconsequential and did not reveal a correlation with age for any of the qualities but did support the Liang et al. (2002) study by revealing that all growth promoting qualities were rated highly (above 3) supplementing the rich data set from the discussion groups. This research confirms the premise by Weinholtz et al. (1995) that qualitative data can salvage quantitative data. The questionnaire would need further modification before it could be used as a cogent and efficient tool to gather data from human populations about the relational health resources that horses might provide for them. The quantitative component has been relegated to an appendage as I trust that the multi-voiced narratives of the horsewomen has provided a rich data set, despite the logistical problems of sampling and organising attendance at four group discussions.

I write this discussion for you the reader to enable you to engage with my post analysis thoughts and understanding of what this journey of research has been for me. I have endeavoured to be reflexive and it was important that this thesis on the relational health resources provided for women by their horses be considered part of feminist research. The women participants gave subjective points of view emerging from their experiences with horses as gendered embodied beings. In the section below I provide evidence that this research has been a feminist inquiry. Finally, I offer a cogent argument for a future of the relational health benefits of animals to be placed within the discipline of health psychology.

12.1 Feminist research

The feminist perspective implies reflexivity and I understand the interactive process of research is shaped by my personal agenda which has a historiographical perspective based in the social context of the research. I have attempted to provide a continuous reflection on the entire research process to discard the taint of the male-dominated discourse, particularly underpinning the positivist assumptions of reliability, validity and biases. I have encouraged realities that can conflict and still co-exist. My goal was to write meaningfully and evocatively about a topic that has a sensory and emotional impact on me. The writing up process has certainly been like completing a collage and I hope the final product proves to be an acceptable pastiche. I will now critically discuss this study using the feminist research framework proposed by Montell (1999) and introduced in Chapter 2.

Montell (1999) considers that any research that is to be considered feminist research should be grounded in the following five basic epistemological principles. Firstly the research should be gender explicit and inclusive of women. Secondly it should challenge the positivist dichotomy between the researcher and the researched. Thirdly feminist epistemology must hold consciousness raising as a central tenet. Fourthly the process and/or outcomes should be empowering for women involved and finally, ethical concerns must be implicit. In this feminist research the participants were white and middleclass. Im (2000) would point out their likeness to me, the researcher. Where is the voice of horsemen in their relationships to horses? The title of the thesis excludes men, however, it would be interesting for future research to be carried out of the relational health benefits that men perceive horses provide for them.

12.1.1 Gender explicit

The first of Montell's (1999) five basic epistemological principles of feminist research is to be gender explicit. Viewing this research from a feminist perspective, gendered power relations emerged as a significant influence on their lifestyle choices at different development life stages. Firstly the conformity to the 'girl sport' with horses (Jones, 1983). Brown (2003, para. 7) interviewed the author Bonnie Hiller, who wrote the '*Saddle Club*' series under the pseudonym of Bonnie Bryant. She is quoted as saying "If you ask one of those readers what my books are about, the author says, they'll tell you they are about horses — but the fact is, they're about friendship".

Later as teenagers they worked hard to raise the money to acquire their first horse. Then as mothers the social expectations of women's familial obligations became constraining influences on their choices. As embodied women, social and biological determinants combined to affect their decisions, as they temporarily privileged family commitments before returning to horses. Some refined their occupational work roles to create opportunities to maintain a life with horses. The women participants perceived that professional male riders seem free from this priority. Kay's (2004) research confirms that men and women prioritise the three domains in their life, work, leisure and family differently which can create tensions in a companionate marriage.

At an even later developmental stage, after grown up children have left home, some of the women participants were re-defining themselves and realising their potential with horses in their lives. There was a general agreement that horses had enriched the lives of these women participants and had no plans to disengage from this relationship.

Discourses are always culturally and historically located and the gender discourse that was generated and communicated in this research revealed the ways in which the women participants could speak of, or know about gender with respect to riding ability. In equestrian competition the women described the difference between males and females, which reflected social relationships. Males were considered aggressive in a competitive hierarchy and as females they perceived their position within the group to support other competitors. Carpenter (2004) is currently researching the differences between how men and women relate to horses. She believed that men viewed horses as instrumental, to be used as tools, as in herding cattle, and that women perceived horses as friends. The only gender difference she reported was that women scored significantly higher on the 'Horses as Objects of Beauty Scale' than the men. In the research presented here the women participants identified hegemonic masculinities with regard to the sexual orientation of some male riders and generated new knowledge as they tried to attempt to understand the relationship between homosexual and heterosexual men and their horses.

The feminist perspective on human-animal relationship should focus on what the animals are in the relationship. From the perspective of the women participants the role of the horse is a cultural prescription defined by them; examples include the baby to be nurtured or grumpy old man to be watched carefully in case he bites. Birke (2002) believes that horses learn to perform the role assigned to them which emerges from their relationships with the women. The power is with the women to create an 'other'. These women also have the power to keep the horse captive in stable and paddock. Aron (2001) may describe the horse-woman relationship as a forceful big/delicate small relationship where the paradoxically more powerful woman exploits

the energy of the horse and curtails its daily freedom. The women control access to resources, decide when they should breed and determine breed mates. Also, they decide the fate of the horse in terms of its sale and even the decision to euthanise it.

Language is not an objective system of coding but a representation of how an individual's reality is constructed (Berman, 1992). In telling stories for this research the women participants used language and it must be remembered that the English language is man-made (Spender, 1980). It includes the meaning of men in their position of patriarchal dominance maintaining the subordination and oppression of both women and nature. Thus the dominant paradigm reinforces dualistic assumptions fundamental to the Cartesian worldview of the separation between male and female, nature and culture, mind and body, emotion from reason and intuition from fact. The male bias in environmental discourse states that the act of naming an object precedes owning it, which precedes using it until finally it is used up (Bergman, 2003). Lasher (1996) asks for an equitable treatment of nonhumans and calls for honest rather than deceitful language.

Regarding the dichotomies above, I like to blur boundaries and similar to Berman (1992) I consider the perpetuation of these dichotomies is detrimental to achieving an egalitarian society in harmony with, rather than exploiting nature. The language used by the women participants can be revealing. At times the choice of individual words seemed to be important to emphasise meaning, for instance when Marie was not satisfied with the word 'cause' provided by one of the other women participants, but preferred 'aim' instead to emphasise a goal to attain. The women used metaphor as a means of expressing emotion-based associations (Lubart & Getz, 1997). However, Driscoll (1999) provides another explanation for the reason why women incorporate metaphors in their stories. It is related to power and androcentric bias in language, as words cannot yet fully describe the lived experience of women. When describing her moment of one-ness, of transcendence Chris found it difficult to put her experience with horses into words. Although language remains a powerful human tool which perpetuates existing social hierarchically structures in an anthropocentric world view, these women did not defer to speciesism and related to their horses as other humans.

Generally, in the discourses about what animals representations mean to humans, Bergman (2003) says that how our representations affect the animals is rarely discussed. They believe that academic discourse must find a new way of talking about animals that treats them as autonomous living creatures rather than as texts that we produce. However, there has been little academic attention to the possibility that animals actively construct a social worldview and if such constructs do exist, they may not be recognised by words used in human language

dominated understandings. I support Birke (2002) who believes academic research should endeavour to recognize the many ways in which various animals engage with their worlds.

On many occasions the women participants attributed human affective, emotional and cognitive states to their horses and anthropomorphised them. Mullin (1999) writes historically that anthropomorphism in the scientific community was considered an error of judgement, had to be avoided and was caused by ignorance and undue sentimentality. More recently post-modern sensibilities have challenged the biased androcentric, patriarchal and logocentric interpretations and the use of anthropomorphism has been reconsidered and provides evidence of the changing values attributed to animals and the environment. For these women participants to give human characteristics to their horses reveals how they value their horses.

According to Wetherell & Edley (1999) discourse analysis draws theoretically from Foucauldian notions where power constitutes subjects and discourse is comprised of knowledge and power. Gill (1997) suggests the relation between discourse and power should be an analytical question and I have attempted to address this. The women participants in this research revealed their own sense of self as they actively positioned themselves in the talk or when others were positioning them or re-positioning them within the discourse.

Lawrence (2002) warns that the how we write and talk about animals is inseparable from how we treat them. In the power discourse, I have used the term 'it' for horse, objectifying the animal. As a feminist I understand and accept that objectification has led to exploitation and abuse of the 'other' in the past. Are these women participants, who breed, ride and compete in equestrian activities objectifying and exploiting the horses in their lives? As Bauman (1997) reminds us, these horses are not consenting individuals but perceived as property, owned for the pleasure of the woman. The desire these women have for control over a powerful animal may be a reflection of the women subjugating patriarchy, however, Bauman (1997) believes it is a metaphor, representing women's continuous battle for equality. I would like to remind the reader of the responsive nature of a group of horses in a paddock that choose to approach rather than avoid contact with these women participants. In this respect they are free to choose their behaviour and they choose affiliation. The quote below is apt and engages both perspectives. It is from an interview with the author of *'Saddle Club'*.

Kids spend a lot of time being told what to do and when and how to do it. I think it's very satisfying for them to be able to get into the saddle on top of a very large animal, which is cute and responsive and furry and warm and to tell it what to do and it does what you tell it (Brown, 2003, para. 14).

Brown mentions the horses' responsiveness but also how the children enjoy dominating the behaviour of the horse. I am still in an uncomfortable place with this but defend my position in that my relationship is a partnership, while riding we are in harmony. I perceive my horses as friends and subjects, not objects. It is a difficult paradox, a challenge. Another challenge for me was to take on the anti-positivist stance of not separating myself from the research.

12.1.2 Challenge: Separation of researcher and researched

Montell's (1999) second epistemological principle of the feminist method is also related to power and control. In this research it has been difficult to simultaneously be the researcher and a participant in the research. In the focus groups the women participants may have had more control in the production of the social dialogue; however, I was aware of the social rules. I had not eliminated the unequal power relationship between myself and the women participants. I initiated the research and determined the selection of participants, the location of the focus group and the agenda for discussion.

To negate any authoritarian or hierarchical issues, I like Gergen (2001) situated myself as one of the participants hoping the project would be intersubjective, participatory and emancipatory. However, at some points I had to disengage with the dialogue as I checked various 'housekeeping' tasks – that is trying to predict if there was enough tape left to record an interesting story that was unfolding. Also, in the first focus group, I felt that my agenda to cover topics may have directed the conversation as revealed in my role as the questioner in some of the dialogue. In the second focus group I was more confident and let a more natural conversation unfold.

The dynamics of the focus group combined the advantages of in-depth interviewing with participant observation (Montell, 1999). The women participants had the opportunity to tell their stories in a supportive atmosphere; others could contradict or seek clarification or were stimulated to provide examples from their own experiences to elaborate. The participants felt safe to challenge each other particularly with assumptions of gender related to riding. Another positive feature was that I was able to observe interactions and note non-verbal gestures and the paralanguage of vocal intonations.

The issue of whose interpretation is represented in this thesis, the women participants in the discussion groups (focus groups and interpretative communities) or mine as researcher also needs to be considered. Gergen (2001, p. 100) suggests "all interpretations are constructions" and I consider these accounts to be joint productions, dynamic in their construction as another

layer is added during the discussion groups. The effect was not merely additive as each woman participant revealed their story but showed how these women negotiated meanings and emergent issues with each other. Evidence of the social nature of knowledge emerged as some women took on the role of questioner to include others, or supporter of statements, even as protagonists. Thus providing insight into the social relations and underlying assumptions.

I have been sensitive to the relationship between me as the researcher and researched and was aware that these horsewomen became anxious as they remembered witnessing cruelty to horses by others. In the context it would not have been considered sensitive to raise the dark side of human relationships with horses, that is, of brutality and bestiality. I may have avoided these issues to protect myself. Haidt (2001) would describe my response as being 'morally dumfounded' and is based on emotions and gut feelings.

I have mentioned the illusory nature of the equality between the researcher and the researched, however, in this research I extended the participatory nature to empower the women participants. As power relationships are negotiated in the social milieu of everyday life, so they evolve in the focus groups. The power operated discursively and social positioning enabled them to determine who could speak and what could be said. As a group they were actively involved in meaning making as a collaborative process while asking questions of others during the focus group discussions. Also, they were invited to contribute to further analysis in the interpretative communities. This extended the research and was expensive in terms of time commitment. As a feminist method it slowed the research and can be criticised by placing excessive demands on the women participants. However, written feedback (Appendix P) from those that gave many hours of their time to discuss their passion with me show that they enjoyed the experience as a conscious raising exercise.

In the writing up phase I made new interpretations as I had time to immerse myself in the transcripts, I had the ability to read and re-read the dialogue and wonder at the choice of individual words. During this process I have been sensitive to my part, the autoethnography and have been self reflexive. By using my own name in the excerpts and using the first person in the chapters on analysis I have been open about any cultural biases and personal investments.

12.1.3 Consciousness raising

The third of Montell's (1999) five basic epistemological principles of feminist research has a historical antecedent and states that any research should have consciousness raising as a central tenet. The women participants were validated by the others and were able to retain their ability

to be their authentic self. The social support experienced from the others, dispelled feelings of isolation as they came to understand they shared a culture of horses with others. In the interaction there was a continual flow of ideas and a sharing of information. They had an opportunity to reflect on and re-evaluate their experiences with horses and were exposed to alternative views and different experiences.

The women participants were able to reformulate their life stories which were examined by empathetic reflective listeners. The simple act of sharing stories is enormously powerful, it deepens relationships and allows reflection. Folkman & Moscovitz (2003) take the perspective of positive psychology and state that sharing emotions in everyday life with others can be a coping strategy and enhance well-being. I would claim that this research defies the customary positive scientific value free approach and was emancipatory. This was reinforced with the high uptake of initial focus group members that wished to participate further in the research, saying they enjoyed the opportunity to talk freely about their passion with such a supportive group of women. Trust and group cohesiveness developed, one member of the second focus group that could not attend wished her contact details to be given to one of the other members, revealing that she wanted to continue sharing their common interest.

The horse itself is considered as a therapeutic environment by these women. They perceive the horse as a counselor with qualities of being emotionally present, attuned, and empathically allowing them to be their authentic selves. In Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) therapists are enlisting the help of horses to make people whole again. In this role the horse has been described by Kohanov (2001) as a 'wounded healer' that can discern the emotionally incongruent and by Frewin and Gardiner (2004) as a 'four million year old sage'. EAP offers a new experiential therapy and according to Tidmarsh & Tidmarsh (2004) the horse is used as a unique, dynamic and powerful living being that can act as a catalyst for promoting positive change in people. The use (note utilitarian concept) of the horse in collaboration with a psychotherapist in the short-term therapeutic process of promoting emotional growth and learning in others is gaining in confidence, but returns to the pathogenic assumption and was the topic of Taylor's (2001) masterate thesis.

Strozzi (2004) believes the emerging fields of EAP and Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP) don't fully describe the domains of human growth and learning that can be facilitated by the horse's innate wisdom. She also prefers the salutogenic approach and lists further domains, including Equine Experiential Learning (EEL) and Equine Assisted Learning (EAL). In the future Strozzi (2004, para. 5) suggests potential problems of certification of non-horsey facilitators who lack the experience of the "complex field of equine emotional, spiritual,

biological and psychological awareness of horses” and also raises the issue of potential danger. EAGALA (2002) have devised a code of ethics and practice but it is obvious that critical research must parallel the introduction of these novel forms of experiential learning to determine their efficacy.

12.1.4. Empowering women

Giorgi & Giorgi (2003, p. 46) state that “true closure of a research process is when the published material is read by a competent colleague. Without the reading of a research report, the entire process becomes practically useless”. I fear that this attitude may be widely held in academia, I would prefer this thesis to be read by the women participants and other horsewomen. I take a political stance to affirm the participant’s claim to generate the knowledge about themselves and to give them power to do so. A new mode of knowledge formation may exist, as a feminist researcher in psychology, using focus groups and subverting some of the power differentials, I may have constructed a chimera between scientific knowledge and phenomenological self-knowledge that builds on the power/knowledge nexus.

Montell’s (1999) fourth basic epistemological principles of the feminist method states that research should empower women. The dialogical methodology of the focus groups and interpretative communities has given access to overt and hidden aspects of the experiences these women participants share in their everyday life with their horses. Both researcher and researched are empowered as they are given access to new information. I concur with Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson (2001, p. 98) who states that “Focus groups may ... be held up as a potential tool of a new citizen science”.

Group discussions like these foster a collective identity among the participants because they can transcend the feeling of isolation and individualism and connect through individual narratives, first to themselves in re-membering, then to each other, where points of similarity and difference in the shared stories of their life with horses are recognised and accepted. Returning to the pathological for an example, Berkman (2000, p. 10) argued “people are about twice as likely to die from a wide range of diseases if they are [socially] isolated”. At the biophysiological level, Taylor et al.’s (2000) hormonal studies of the calming influences of oxytocin released when stressed women meet and talk confirms their tending or befriending notion and they conclude that friends are helping us live longer.

The relational dimension to health has often been neglected and Miller’s (2003) relational cultural theory focuses on this central human necessity for growth-fostering relationships and

attempts to understand the day-to-day experiences of women in a cultural and political context. This theoretical paradigm is innovative, focussing on gender, the power of relationships and caretaking in women's lives. I would posit that the discussion groups in this research have provided these women participants with a mutually empowering relationship which can lead to their inner growth. Miller (2003) describes five factors in a mutually empowering relationship, that is, zest, action, knowledge, worth, and a desire for more connection. Substantive evidence to support these statements is provided by the women participants themselves in their written feedback about being a participant in this research (Appendix P).

Zest can be described as the feeling experienced when people make authentic emotional connections with each other (Miller, 2003) this sense of connection energises the individual. In support of this notion of zest, Stella, Sara, Zoe, Marie and Chris had this to write about a collective identity, the shared passion of horses.

Stella : Found we all had very similar stories, ideals and values regarding our horses. Very valuable for me to meet similar minded individuals.

Sara: ...being able to talk about horsey things with other horsey people.

Zoe: I enjoyed the opportunity to be with others, who also have a passion for horses.

Marie: Enjoyed the opportunity to meet others with similar interests.

Chris: ...we all had a common interest – HORSES

The experience was valuable for Stella and both Zoe and Marie report that they experienced joy, which may be interpreted as being energised by the process of connection. According to Lasher (1998) this sense of connection allows the women to feel a deep sense of freedom and inner peace.

One of Zoe's post-participant quotes was very powerful; she is urged into action (Miller, 2003). The interaction with the other women participants has impact and a change has been created in her.

Zoe: This research has stirred within me new questions about why I love horses so much.

Her experience has raised her consciousness, she has been empowered to seek further understanding within herself about why horses are so important for her, a previously assumed, taken-for-granted part of her life. The stories of the other women participants have echoed their feelings within Zoe. As stories were shared, the women participants were opened up to a greater potential in themselves (Miller, 2003) and were given insights into the relationships the others had with their horses. New knowledge about the woman-horse relationship was co-created in a supportive manner providing a safe platform for mutual growth. Lynne and Chris had this to write about sharing their stories with the others.

Lynne: I love any opportunity to talk about my horses.

Chris: I found it easy to share experiences with the group

While Lynne, Zoe and Sara wrote that they appreciated the opportunity to listen and hear the stories of others, some with different viewpoints.

Lynne: Good to hear other views and experiences

Zoe: After listening to the others in my group...

Sara: ...finding out what experiences and feelings we share and how we are different in relation to horses.

Although Lynne and Marie were participants in the same focus group their perceptions reveal the multiple realities that can occur. Lynne identifies with her experiences as a carer of horses and Marie feels other members of her group had a more romantic view of their relationship with horses than her experience will allow her to admit to.

Lynne: I felt our group actually loved their animals (horses), that they didn't just have them for competition purposes.

Marie: Felt somewhat at odds with the 'Pollyanna' view of the equine world/industry – maybe I have been more involved at a different level.

Despite differences the women participants felt a sense of worth (Miller, 2003), as others listened and responded respectfully. They recognized and acknowledged the experience of the other women participants, validating these experiences as they are told, nurturing each others self-esteem. Stiver (2000, para. 15) says “Women's relationships are part of their essential being and that mutual empathy is at the center of their development”. Evidence for mutual empathy within the discussion groups can be revealed by the high number of supportive ‘mmm’'s and ‘yeah’'s uttered by the listeners. I have calculated that these supportive utterances average one for every thirty-six words spoken and spontaneous general laughter (*Gl*) erupted every one hundred and thirty-five words. Future comparative analysis of this sort of quantitative data within qualitative data may provide useful measures for the empowering effect of focus group research methods.

The feeling of connection to the other members of the discussion group were stimulated to seek further connection as new friendships have emerged from this research. Relationships that are close are important psychological resources to the self-system that maintains health through adversity (Sedikides, 2005) and according to Miller (2003) the desire for more connections occurs in growth-enhancing relationships.

In their storytelling the women participants connect to the constraints of wider social and cultural influences. With the discourse on nurturing, maternal obligations and the gender

discourse they have connected with dominant Western ideologies but have re-membered and re-claimed themselves. In this connection, the women have needed power to advance their development, but it is not at the expense of the other women. As Miller (1976) says, women do not use power to limit the growth of other women.

12.1.5 Ethical concerns

Ethical concerns are implicit in feminist research and this is the fifth epistemological principle according to Montell (1999). Conducting research on the emotional life of these women participants has necessitated interference at some level and created ethical dilemmas that required me to justify my selected procedures and methodologies (Yassour-Borochowitz, 2004). Montell (1999) provides a justification when she states that bringing a group of women, independent of the dominant group, together to talk about issues that are important to them creates a raised consciousness and solidarity among the participants, even if only a temporarily.

In the discussion groups a level of trust developed that gave the women participants' permission to raise sensitive issues, such as the grief experience by loss of a horse, a mothers' dilemma allowing her child to risk potential injury and the effect of sexual orientation of characteristics of a rider. It is more likely that these issues, raised by participants, prompted more dialogue and exchange than if raised by a researcher in a position of power. As mentioned in the last section the women were empowered and nurtured by the presence of the other women participants at the time of disclosure.

Montell (1999) suggested that homogenous anonymous groups would foster a feeling of comfort and mutual understanding. I found in this research where the women participants knew at least one other participant before attending a focus group meeting was valuable in generating mutual understanding. In the first focus group, the synergy between two friends enhanced self-revelation as they acted to prompt each other. However, it may also have inhibited each of them when more sensitive issues were raised. The dynamics of the ad hoc, second focus group facilitated a more vigorous discussion of sensitive issues and they also maximised their connections with each other. When one participant knew she would not be able to attend the interpretative community due to a prior commitment she asked that her contact details be given to another participant so they might continue to share more similar stories.

Finally, expectations that the research process would be fun and interesting were confirmed by post-participant replies. In all six replies I received (from the nine participants) the women either wrote that they had enjoyed the process or thanked me for the opportunity to take part.

12.2 Future directions

In the future a move towards health promotion and wellness, away from the pathological approach, and is needed. At present academic research in this area is fragmented and requires integration. I will discuss how this thesis on the relational health resources that horses have provided for these women participants fit into the fields emerging in health research and psychology, that is, relational health, well-being, and salutogenesis.

12.2.1 Relational health

The future of psychology is as a relational science, studying connectedness, “how relationships evolve to create human activity” (Gergen, 1994, cited in Gergen, 2001, p. 194). The British Psychological Society has named 2005 the ‘Year of Relationships’ (Jowett, 2005). Transactions of everyday life affect health and the close physical transactions these women participants had with their horses had a positive effect on their health. Within relational well-being, actions to self, others and society are value driven and animals as partners may create positive transformative change in individuals marginalised by society. It is posited that with regard to ‘otherness’, western ideology has returned to the worldviews of indigenous peoples that have always maintained a moralistic almost spiritual affinity with the non-human environment, including animals.

12.2.2 Well-being

The working definition for health and well-being of the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (2004) includes the ability to engage fully in many facets of life, including the physical, psychological and spiritual, social and cultural, and the economic and political factors, including the ability to exercise choice and control over daily activities to increase productivity and life satisfaction. In 2003 Barnaby stated that a life well lived allows us to live healthily and happily and well-being is a positive, sustainable state enabling individuals to flourish and thrive. She included dimensions of physical fitness and vitality as well as social ties with satisfying relationships. The stories these women participants’ tell of their everyday lives with horses echo these qualities and confirm their feelings of well-being.

The last century created a leisure society within the western culture and active leisure became important for health and well-being, reducing depression and anxiety, producing positive moods, enhancing self-esteem and self-concept, facilitating social interaction, increasing general

psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction, and improving cognitive functioning (Haworth, 2004). In our post-modern world of diversity, stresses, threats and opportunities this research into the well-being of a group of women whose active leisure involves daily interaction with horses may be a small step into the future of health psychology research of the twenty-first century.

12.2.3 Salutogenesis rather than pathogenesis

I have been fortunate to have had a healthy and fulfilling life and have always wondered why health psychology adopted the medical model of pathologisers of disease victims (Joseph & Kauffman, 2004). This focus on pathology has neglected the fulfilled individual within a thriving community (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Hoge & Bussing (2004) reject this traditional pathogenetic paradigm in favour of the salutogenetic model, which claims a continuum from health to ill-health. From a salutogenetic point of view the fundamental question is “What makes us healthy?” not “What causes us illness or distress?” I find it curious; the dearth of research about what makes healthy people healthy and I hope this research focussing on a group of healthy women living in a horse community with its particular discourses has been explicated and will address this imbalance.

Health psychologists have rarely investigated how normal people flourish under benign conditions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This thesis reveals how a group of women flourish in their daily lives interacting with horses and is following the current zeitgeist. It has been predicted that scientific research in psychology will emphasise the quality of everyday life of the whole person (Haste, Hogan & Zachariou, 2001). Let health psychology be a future discipline that engages in research into this quality.

Antonovsky (n.d.) regarded as the founder of salutogenesis states that health involves individuals maintaining their sense of coherence (SOC), that is, their ability to sense that life is comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful. The role integration model proposed by Meleis (1989, cited in Im, 2000) incorporates SOC with positive well-being to explain the importance to health of social support in the daily life of women. To unravel the mystery of health, research must occur within a context guided by explicit values as the phenomenon takes place within relationships (Schüffel, n.d.). In this thesis the relationship involves a non-human but is nevertheless an important relationship for the women participants.

Heim (1994) describes salutogenesis as the ability to rely on internal (optimism, hardiness) and/or external resources (social support) to withstand life stressors. Health psychologists

should aim to help people live fulfilling and rewarding lives (Joseph & Kauffman, 2004) with research focussing on the strengths of individuals and their support networks. Budge, Spicer, Jones and George (1998) confirm the social support offered by animals is positively associated with mental health but warns the animal and human must be compatible. This research suggests that the support networks for women can be extended to their compatible horses.

Future researchers should investigate the health benefits associated with sharing a life with a non-human animal. There is a need for a theoretical framework to provide a foundation for future investigations into the effectiveness of animals as in maintaining human health. I argue that this research should naturally be within the discipline of health psychology where the epistemology and ontology bases of feminism and post-modernism are influencing research (Ussher 1999) with a critical and subjective reflexivity. Mullin (1999) reminds us that researching into human-nonhuman animal relationships provides a commentary of the history of social analysis of humans by connecting colonialism with anthropology and also considers the environmental dimensions.

The quantitative part of this research has been subordinated by the compelling stories told by the women participants about their daily interactions with horses. In this qualitative research the women have been active participants, using language as a representation of their reality. In the analysis of discourse, I added another layer of reality, the reflexive aspect. We became collaborators co-constructing and re-constructing meaning associated with sharing our lives with horses. Pincus (2004) aptly puts forward a notion that how we live our daily lives and the resources available to us defines our health status. This reinforces Shotter's notion of 'joint actions' and the importance of everyday reactions to situations and others. In this thesis the women participants have provided evidence that their daily interactions with horses and the horse community provide them with health resources at individual, subjective and community levels.

Chapter 13 Conclusion

This thesis has shown that horses have provided relational health resources for this group of healthy women. The five growth promoting qualities in the relationship have been described in this study. They are authenticity, empowerment, engagement, connection to other humans and connection to nature. The everyday experiences of the women participants with their horses has enhanced their feeling of health and well-being; physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

In this thesis the theoretical paradigm has been innovative, focussing on gender, the power of relationships and caretaking in women's lives with horses. This socially active discourse is historically and culturally embedded, so it is specific and represents the subjectivities of these women participants. The emancipatory knowledge constructed may improve the health and well-being of others (Morgan, 1999) if more women could be empowered to fulfil their dreams and be enabled to share their lives with horses. The application of horses assisting in human health development is an emerging field which will require ongoing monitoring.

The relevance of this research is that it has returned women's health from the male domain to the women themselves (Ruzek & Becker, 2002). It has been a consciousness raising exercise for the women participants and has empowered them to define their own health in relationship with their horses. For these women their horse resonates important qualities, such as, commitment, nurturing, compassion, acceptance, spirituality, seasonal cycles, sensuality, freedom and adventure (Midkiff, 2001).

A new generation of researchers in positive health psychology should focus on prevention of illness. Wissing et al. (2004) are developing an inter-disciplinary research programme to promote a fortigenic perspective on human strengths and well-being. They are actively promoting research into people's strengths and facilitation of bio-psycho-social well-being at the individual, group and community level. According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2001) future research is required into the human strengths that provide buffers against illness, such as the capacity for flow, courage, honesty, perseverance. Horses have provided all of these strengths for these women participants. Closely monitored facilities that potentially provide equine facilitated learning for all may become available and health psychologists working in this field must create a science of human strength to more fully understand how positive traits and experiences with horses can be fundamental to health and well-being.

The implications of this research would be to further understand what horses and other animals can provide to improve the health of others in a quest for a happier and healthier world. Like

Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000, p. 12) I believe “that a psychology of positive human functioning will arise that achieves a scientific understanding and effective interventions to build thriving in individuals, families, and communities.”

Future research in the eclectic discipline of health psychology is required to increase our understanding of this unique and intimate relationship between humans and non-human animals so we might explicate what these relationships add to our lived, every day experience of health.

Gergen (1985, p. 272) believes that the written outcome of qualitative research should “... invite, compel, stimulate and delight”. It is your decision. Have you been stimulated? Even if you have no passion for horses, can you understand our passion?

Appendix A Questionnaire

OF HEALTHY WOMEN AND HORSES
QUESTIONNAIRE

| | |
|------------|--------------|
| Age | |
| | years |

Instructions: Next to each statement, please indicate the number that best applies to your relationship with horses.

| | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1 never | 2 seldom | 3 sometimes | 4 often | 5 always |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|

| No. | Statement | Rating (1-5) |
|-----|---|--------------|
| 1 | Even when I have difficult things to share, I can be honest and real with my horse. | |
| 2 | After talking with my horse I feel uplifted. | |
| 3 | The more time I spend with my horse, the closer I feel to them. | |
| 4 | I feel understood by my horse. | |
| 5 | I can talk with my horse without feeling judged. | |
| 6 | I am uncomfortable sharing my deepest feelings and thoughts with my horse. | |
| 7 | I have a greater sense of self-worth through my relationship with my horse. | |
| 8 | I feel positively changed by my horse. | |
| 9 | My friendship with my horse causes me to grow in important ways. | |
| 10 | I don't feel energised by interactions with my horse. | |
| 11 | Sharing experience with my horse enhances my life. | |
| 12 | My horse gives me emotional support. | |
| 13 | Horses have shaped my identity in many ways. | |
| 14 | I don't feel I know myself better because of my connection to my horse. | |
| 15 | My relationship with horses has made it easier to make new friends. | |

Thankyou. I value your contribution to my research on the importance of horses in the lives of women.

Appendix B Information sheet - Questionnaire

OF HEALTHY WOMEN AND HORSES
INFORMATION SHEET for QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear female riding club member

Hello. My name is Ruth Billany, I am a master’s student from Massey University’s School of Psychology undertaking research into the relationships between women and their horses. I wonder if you would like to participate.

Pets, or companion animals, are said to be good for people. The scientific evidence is overwhelming that cats and dogs make us happier, healthier and more sociable. In this study I want to see if this extends to horses.

I invite you to complete the attached anonymous questionnaire. It should only take 10 minutes to complete. Completion of questionnaire implies consent. You have the right to decline to answer any particular question.

I would appreciate it, if you return the completed questionnaire to me in the stamped, self addressed envelop provided by [date].

All information you provide will be on the understanding that your response is anonymous. Your age would be helpful for me – as there may be a difference in the responses between younger women and older women. The questionnaires will be kept securely by my supervisor at Massey University and destroyed after a period of five years.

If you have any queries regarding this research, please contact me or my supervisor. I will write a summary of the results of the questionnaire in a future newsletter.

| | |
|---|--|
| Ruth Billany [Contact details given] | Supervisor: Mandy Morgan School of Psychology Massey University Palmerston North Ph: 06 350 5799 Email: C.A.Morgan@massey.ac.nz |
|---|--|

Thank you.
Ruth Billany

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 04/08. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz

Appendix C Information sheet – Focus group

OF HEALTHY WOMEN AND HORSES INFORMATION SHEET for FOCUS GROUP

Thank you for returning a signed consent form and agreeing to take part in one of the focus groups in this research for my masterate thesis in psychology.

The focus group will be held in [month].

The venue will be [my address given], petrol vouchers will be available for reimbursement, if required. If there is a problem with the travel arrangements, please contact me.

When you arrive, there will be an introduction period with refreshments.

When all participants have arrived I will go over the information sheet and explain confidentiality issues, also I will answer any queries you may have.

I will then ask you to sign confidentiality agreement before we begin to discuss the importance of horses in our lives. This will be audio-taped. I envisage this process taking one and a half hours.

- You have the right to
- Decline to participate
- Decline to talk about particular issues
- Withdraw from the study during the data gathering period
- Have the tape-recorder turned off at any point
- Ask any questions about this study at any time during participation
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings

All information you provide will be on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission. The audio-tapes and transcripts will be kept securely. The audiotapes will be destroyed at the end of the project, that is, [date] and the transcripts will be destroyed after a period of five years.

When the audiotapes have been transcribed, I shall send you a copy of your part and ask you to check that it is correct. At this point you may decide to delete or add any information. Please return the transcript to me in the prepaid envelope so that I may collate your stories with those of the others.

After my initial analyses, you may still want to be involved in assisting me as part of an interpretative community looking at emergent themes from another focus group. This will take place at another meeting to be held in [date]. If you want to be involved in this latter part of the research, just let me know.

Appendix C (cont.) Information sheet – Focus group

A summary of the results will be included in a future riding club newsletter.

If you have any further queries regarding this research, please contact myself or my supervisor.

| | |
|---|---|
| Ruth Billany [Contact details given] | Supervisor: Mandy Morgan School of Psychology Massey University Palmerston North Ph: 06 350 5799 Email: C.A.Morgan@massey.ac.nz |
|---|---|

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 04/08. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz

Thank you.
Ruth Billany

Appendix D Consent form - Focus group

**OF HEALTHY WOMEN AND HORSES
FOCUS GROUP**

CONSENT FORM

THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE (5) YEARS

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature **Date**

Full Name – printed

Contact details (to arrange date/travel for focus group meeting)

Address
.....

Phone no. **email**

Appendix E Questionnaire development

A new relational health model was put forward and a measuring instrument developed for the assessment of women's psychological development and well-being. This has been validated as a formal assessment tool (Liang et al., 2001) assessing mentoring, peer, and community relationships in a group of college women. This thesis extends the definition of friends to include horses and the relational health questionnaire was modified by replacing 'friend' or 'mentor' for 'horse'.

The items chosen for the questionnaire (Appendix A) derived from the study of Liang et al. (2002) that reported the validity of their measure, that is, the extent to which it measures what it intends to measure. They demonstrated the construct validity of their tool by showing how their operationalized, quantitative measures correlated with other relevant variables to form a consistent pattern that underlies them both (Fishman, 2000).

As a pragmatist, I was not interested in further validating Liang et al.'s (2002) relational health indices (RHI) with another population of women but was interested in using the relational health indices to provide an opportunity to explore specific dimensions of health provided by horses in relation to the women in this study.

In constructing the items on the questionnaire (Appendix A), I attempted to avoid leading or psychologically threatening questions. Although a modified Likert scale was used to enable a rapid analysis of the response, no single item from the questionnaire or operationalized indicator can directly and fully measure the theoretical constructs of growth promoting qualities in a relationship. So I incorporated the process of triangulation by employing multiple measures of data gathering, the discussion groups which consisted of two focus group meetings and two interpretative communities.

Appendix F Confidentiality agreement – Focus group

**OF HEALTHY WOMEN AND HORSES
FOCUS GROUP**

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

**THIS CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE
(5) YEARS**

The importance of keeping personal information discussed in the interpretative community, within the group has been explained to me. I will not knowingly divulge any such information to third parties.

I..... **(Full Name – printed)**

agree to keep confidential all information concerning the project titled “Of healthy women and horses”.

Signature **Date**

Appendix G List of possible prompts for focus group discussions

Derived from Cusack (1988), Holbrook et al. (2001), Johnson (2001) and Liang et al. (2002).

| Potential prompts for focus groups | Cusack (1988) | Holbrook et al. (2001) | Johnson (2001) | Liang et al. (2002) |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|--|------------------------------------|---|
| *10 | 4 benefits | 7 opportunities | 11 themes | 4 qualities |
| companionship | companionship | companionship, caring, comfort, and/or calmness. | unconditional love and acceptance. | mutual engagement, perceived as a commitment, and attunement to the relationship. |
| | | | accurate empathetic understanding | |
| free to be yourself | support | | accept self | authenticity, the feeling of being free to be genuine in the context of the relationship. |
| chance to forget about other problems | a focus outside self | appreciate nature and to experience wildlife | helped me escape | |
| for security | | | get out of myself | |
| to nurture | protection | | reason to live | |
| | | altruistic and nurturant to parent | security | |
| feel personally strengthened | | desire to nurture | | |
| | | for inspiration and learning | feel powerful | empowerment or the experience of, |
| | | | takes in energy | encouraged, and inspired to take action. |
| to have fun | | to be childlike and playful | | |
| allow you to make new friends | | strengthen bonds with other humans | help with humans | inspired to seek new friends |
| positive effect on your health | | | | |
| any negative factors | | | | |

The health question has been included to reinforce earlier studies on the positive health benefits of human-animal interaction (Edney, 1992) and the negative question is included to determine if despite negative consequences of a relationship with horses women still maintain these relationships.

Appendix H Letter for first member check

[Address of participant]

[Date]

Dear [name of participant],

Re: Of healthy women and horses

Thank you for the time you gave on [date] to attend a focus group meeting, I value your input. It was good to meet you and I hope you enjoyed the evening. I wonder if you would read over the enclosed transcript of your part of that meeting and check that you are happy with the contents. I would prefer the conversational language to remain, that is, don't bother to alter the grammar, or remove the 'umms', etc. When you have finished checking through the transcript I would appreciate it if you would return it together with the signed agreement form in the FREEPOST envelope provided.

The ethics committee reminds me that I must protect the privacy of people, so I have changed [your daughter's name] to 'my daughter'. If you want me to use a pseudonym, please indicate on the attached form and return it with the transcript. Similarly, I have changed the [judges name] to 'a certain judge'. Also, a horse's name has been changed from [horse's name] to a pseudonym. Geographical places have also had to be changed to reduce the chances of any readers recognising them. Please see the attached form for these changes.

If you wish to take part in the next stage of my research, to discuss topics raised in another focus group, then indicate on the attached form and I will contact you at a later date.

Finally, I would appreciate if you would just put some comments down about your perception of the focus group meeting. Thank you.

Regards
Ruth Billany

Note: Please return transcript, focus group transcript form and signed agreement form. Thank you.

**OF HEALTHY WOMEN AND HORSES
FOCUS GROUP**

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TAPE TRANSCRIPTS

THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE (5) YEARS

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the partial transcript of the interpretative community meeting conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used by the researcher, Ruth Billany in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature **Date**

Full Name – printed

OF HEALTHY WOMEN AND HORSES
INFORMATION SHEET for INTERPRETATIVE COMMUNITY

Thank you for agreeing to take part in one of the interpretative communities in this research for my masterate thesis in psychology. Interpretative communities are used in research to help understand issues raised in focus groups and perhaps add a deeper meaning to them.

I will go over the information sheet and explain confidentiality issues, and ask you to sign the confidentiality agreement before we begin also I will answer any queries you may have.

When we begin, you will be provided with a summary of the topics covered in a focus group that you were **not** a member of and I shall ask for your input. This will be audio-taped. I envisage this process taking about one hour.

- You have the right to
- Decline to participate
- Decline to talk about particular issues
- Withdraw from the study during the data gathering period
- Have the tape-recorder turned off at any point
- Ask any questions about this study at any time during participation
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings

All information you provide will be on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission. The audio-tapes and transcripts will be kept securely. The audiotapes will be destroyed at the end of the project, that is, [date] and the transcripts will be destroyed after a period of five years.

When the audiotapes have been transcribed, I shall send you a copy of your part and ask you to check that it is correct. At this point you may decide to delete or add any information. Please return the transcript to me in the prepaid envelope so that I may collate your interpretations with those of the others.

Appendix J (cont.) Information sheet – Interpretative community

If you have any further queries regarding this research, please contact myself or my supervisor.

| | |
|---|--|
| Ruth Billany [Contact details given] | Supervisor: Mandy Morgan School of Psychology Massey University Palmerston North Ph: 06 350 5799 Email: C.A.Morgan@massey.ac.nz |
|---|--|

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 04/08. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz

Thank you.
Ruth Billany

Appendix K Consent form – Interpretative community

**OF HEALTHY WOMEN AND HORSES
INTERPRETATIVE COMMUNITY**

CONSENT FORM

THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE (5) YEARS

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature **Date**

Full Name – printed

**OF HEALTHY WOMEN AND HORSES
INTERPRETATIVE COMMUNITY**

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

**THIS CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE
(5) YEARS**

The importance of keeping personal information discussed in the interpretative community, within the group has been explained to me. I will not knowingly divulge any such information to third parties.

I..... **(Full Name – printed)**

agree to keep confidential all information concerning the project titled “Of healthy women and horses”.

Signature **Date**

Appendix M Letter for second member check

[Address of participant]

[Date]

Dear [name of participant],

Re: Of healthy women and horses

Thank you for the time you gave on [date] to attend the interpretative community meeting where we discussed issues raised at a focus group meeting, I value your input and I hope you enjoyed the evening. I wonder if you would read over the enclosed partial transcript of your part of that meeting and check that you are happy with the contents.

When you have finished checking through the transcript I would appreciate it if you would return it together with the signed agreement form in the FREEPOST envelope provided.

The ethics committee reminds me that I must protect the privacy of people, so I have changed the name of [husband's name] to "my husband" and changed the names of your horses, to render you less identifiable. Please see the attached form for these changes.

Finally, I would appreciate if you would just put some comments down about your experience as being a participant in this research. Thank you.

Regards

Ruth Billany

Note: Please return partial transcript, interpretative community transcript form and signed agreement form. Thank you.

**OF HEALTHY WOMEN AND HORSES
INTERPRETATIVE COMMUNITY**

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TAPE TRANSCRIPTS

THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE (5) YEARS

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the partial transcript of the interpretative community meeting conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used by the researcher, Ruth Billany in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature **Date**

Full Name – printed

Appendix O Letter asking for post-participant feedback

[Address of participant]

[Date]

Dear [name of participant],

Re: Of healthy women and horses

Thank you for the time you gave in [month] to attend the focus group meeting and I hope you enjoyed the evening. On [date] I held a follow up interpretative community meeting where we discussed issues raised at another focus group.

For your interest, I have enclosed a summary of topics raised at that other focus group. Any written comments you wish to make would still be valuable.

Finally, I would appreciate if you would just put some comments down about your experience as being a participant in this research. Thank you.

Regards

Ruth Billany

Note: I enclose a form for you to write any comments and give feedback about the process. If you choose to complete this, I would appreciate it if you would return it in the FREEPOST envelope provided. Consent will be assumed if it is returned.

Appendix P Written comments in post-participant feedback

Sara

Comments about being a participant in this research

It was informal and fun, being able to talk about horsey things with other horsey people, finding out what experiences and feelings we share and how we are different in relation to horses. Well done for making us relaxed enough to forget about the tape recorder. Nice supper too!

Stella

Absent from IC2 - written feedback to FG 1 summary.

I agree totally that my relationship with my ponies/horse is very nurturing for me and my daughters, and incredibly rewarding. My ponies are 'babies' and definitely respond as my children would which I find endearing. I agree that my horses are non-judgemental, although, I work hard with my big horse as she is older and wiser and keeps me honest. I can get away with very little with her!!

Comments about being a participant in this research

Found we all had very similar stories, ideals and values regarding our horses. Very valuable for me to meet similar minded individuals. Very enjoyable, although I am so disorganised I was probably not a very effective participant. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

Zoe

Comments about being a participant in this research

I enjoyed the opportunity to be with others, who also have a passion for horses. This research has stirred within me, new questions about why I love horses so much.

I feel they have kept me sane over my adult years.

My world revolves around animals and my family (Both essential!!).

I'd like to think that I am physically and psychologically healthier through the love of animals.

After listening to the others in my group at Ruth's place, I discovered that we had lots of common stories to tell.

Chris

Comments about being a participant in this research

I found it easy to share experiences with the group as we all had a common interest – HORSES.

Lynne

Comments about being a participant in this research

Good to hear other views and experiences. I felt our group actually loved their animals (horses), that they didn't just have them for competition purposes.

I enjoyed the sessions as I love any opportunity to talk about my horses.

Thank you

Marie

Absent from IC2 - written feedback to FG 1 summary.

Being involved with horses is a wonderful experience and develops, especially for girls 10 -18, excellent work ethics and a sense of responsibility, It also delivers strong lessons on reality, i.e. a rider can be dedicated, motivated, talented – but, if wishing to compete, this will not always be sufficient. Teaches sportsmanship, to fail/lose with dignity and confidence.

Comments about being a participant in this research

Enjoyed the opportunity to meet others with similar interests.

Felt somewhat at odds with the 'Pollyanna' view of the equine world/industry – maybe I have been more involved at a different level.

Appendix Q Quantitative results and analysis

Postal replies from the target population of forty-seven women members of the local Riding Club produced a 55% response rate. The twenty-six replies reflected the age range of the club membership, from seventeen to seventy-five years and measures of central tendency for the ages of the sample were similar with a mean and median of 43 years.

The statements for the fifteen items were derived from a valid instrument developed by Liang et al.'s (2002) three part Relational Health Indices, replacing peer (P), mentor (M) or community (C) with the word 'horse'. Like these researchers, I chose to reverse the wording in some items (Q6, Q10 and Q14) to prevent undesirable response set occurring. Questionnaire responses were received and the scores of three items were reversed before collation into the table of raw data which can be viewed in Table 4 (on page 166).

The items each require a Likert type response to the statement and ranged from (1) never to (5) always indicating the extent of their perceived relationship with their horse. A score of (5) indicates that the woman had a powerful response to the item and considered their horse to provide them with a high level of relational health. Each participant's mean score for all fifteen questionnaire items was calculated. The overall mean score for all items for all participants was 3.75 showing that this population rated their relational health index with their horse as above (3) the mid-point on the scale. This suggests that the women members of the Riding Club that replied to the survey consider their relationship with their horse to be growth fostering.

1 Participant mean scores

Individual means showed variability in the data. The highest in the range was a participant in her mid forties who rated five for each of the fifteen items, revealing her relationship with her horse was perceived as growth promoting. The lowest was a fifty year old whose calculate mean score was 1.73 indicating that she seldom thought her horse provided her with a relational health resource.

Only two individual respondents had a mean score below 3, the median was 3.8 and the distribution was bimodal, 3.60 and 4.13. Statistically, the standard deviation was 0.71 and 16% (2SD) or 4 individuals should be at each extreme that is below 3.04 and above 4.46 which fits the data set well, as there were 4 extreme low scores (L) and three extreme high (H) scores.

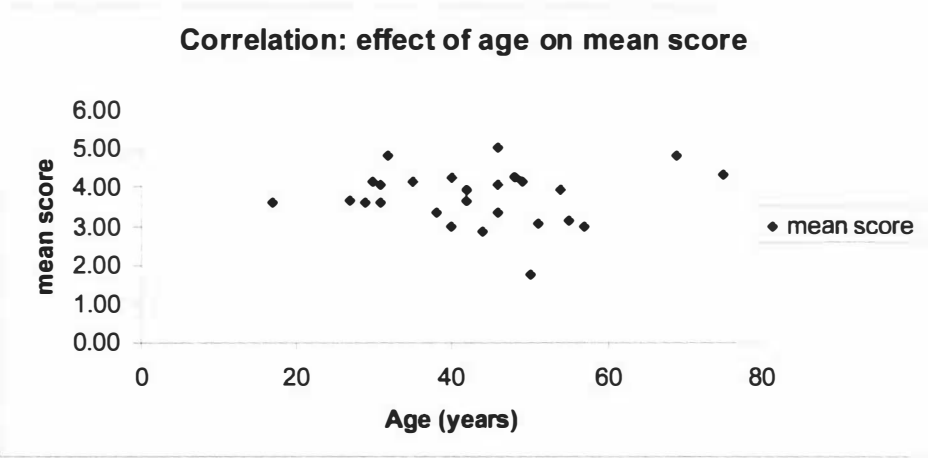
Table 4: Questionnaire raw data

| age (yrs) | | 17 | 27 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 31 | 32 | 35 | 38 | 40 | 40 | 42 | 42 | 44 | 46 | 46 | 46 | 48 | 49 | 50 | 51 | 54 | 55 | 57 | 69 | 75 | mean |
|---------------------------|----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Questionnaire item number | 1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 3.38 |
| | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 3.42 |
| | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4.23 |
| | 4 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2.96 |
| | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 3.85 |
| | 6 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4.27 |
| | 7 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 3.73 |
| | 8 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 3.85 |
| | 9 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3.62 |
| | 10 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4.08 |
| | 11 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4.00 |
| | 12 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 2.92 |
| | 13 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3.88 |
| | 14 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 5 | | 5 | 5 | 4.20 |
| | 15 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3.88 |
| mean | | 3.60 | 3.67 | 3.60 | 4.13 | 4.07 | 3.60 | 4.80 | 4.13 | 3.33 | 4.27 | 3.00 | 3.93 | 3.67 | 2.87 | 5.00 | 4.07 | 3.33 | 4.27 | 4.13 | 1.73 | 3.07 | 3.93 | 3.13 | 3.00 | 4.80 | 4.33 | 3.75 |

2 Age effect

A scattergram, the visual representation of the data showing age in years against mean score was created in Excel and can be seen in Figure 4 (on page 166).

Figure 4: Scattergram showing the age of participant and mean score



No correlation seemed to be indicated. A non-parametric Spearman's *rho* was calculated to be - 0.0018803 and confirmed sighting from the graph that this data provided no significant

correlation between the two variables, age of the women participants and how she rated the extent of the relational health resource provided by her horse.

The means for grouped ages still did not show an age effect. The extreme low and high scorers probably accounted for the deviation from the mean of 3.75 in Table 5 (on page 167).

Table 5: Mean score for different age group of women participant.

| Year group | Number in sample | Scores outside mean $\pm 1SD$ | Mean score (1-5) |
|------------|------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| below 30 | 3 | | 3.62 |
| 31-39 | 6 | H | 4.01 |
| 40-49 | 10 | LLH | 3.85 |
| 50-59 | 5 | LL | 2.97 |
| above 60 | 2 | H | 4.57 |

Even though 55% of targeted sample replied, 26 actual respondents have provided a small sample so biases have occurred and the data is not worthy of robust parametric tests of inference. However, further descriptive analyses are warranted. The mean score of 3.75 had a standard deviation of 0.42, revealing a smaller variance between this set of data (item means) and the standard deviation of the individual means. I decided to analyse the extent these women participants rated the growth fostering qualities of their horse.

3 *RHI: The extent of the three growth promoting qualities*

Scores were divided into the three different growth fostering factors, according to Liang et al. (2002), authenticity (A), engagement (E) and empowerment/zest (Z). Tables 6-8 for this data can be seen on page 168. The means for each of these showed authenticity (3.88) and empowerment (3.86) ranked higher than engagement (3.43). This reveals that this sample of women ranked the authentic and empowering qualities that their horses provide for them above the engagement factor. However, the smaller sample may have further skewed the results.

The four questionnaire items that measured authenticity were 1, 5, 6, and 11. A mean score to reveal the extent of this quality was 3.88. This figure cannot provide an insight into the women’s ability to be authentic within the woman-horse relationship.

Table 6: Authenticity items – mean scores

| No. | Authenticity Statements | Mean Rating (1-5) | RHI Source | Rank |
|-----|--|-------------------|------------|------|
| 6 | <i>comfortable sharing deepest feelings and thoughts</i> | 4.27 | P8 | 1 |
| 11 | enhances my life | 4.00 | M4 | 5 |
| 5 | without feeling judged | 3.85 | P6 | 8.5 |
| 1 | can be honest and real | 3.38 | P1 | 13 |

Table 7: Engagement items – mean scores

| No. | Engagement Statements | Mean Rating (1-5) | RHI Source | Rank |
|-----|-------------------------------|-------------------|------------|------|
| 3 | more time - the closer I feel | 4.23 | P3 | 2 |
| 9 | causes me to grow | 3.62 | P12 | 11 |
| 4 | feel understood | 2.96 | P4 | 14 |
| 12 | emotional support | 2.92 | M6 | 15 |

Table 8: Empowerment items – mean scores

| No. | Empowerment/Zest Statements | Mean Rating (1-5) | RHI Source | Rank |
|-----|----------------------------------|-------------------|------------|------|
| 14 | <i>feel I know myself better</i> | 4.20 | M5 | 3 |
| 10 | <i>feel energised</i> | 4.08 | M8 | 4 |
| 13 | shaped my identity | 3.88 | C13 | 6.5 |
| 15 | easier to make new friends | 3.88 | C12 | 6.5 |
| 8 | feel positively changed | 3.85 | P10 | 8.5 |
| 7 | greater sense of self-worth | 3.73 | P9 | 10 |
| 2 | uplifted | 3.42 | P2 | 12 |

Engagement can be defined as sharing in activities with others and if attuned to an other, you are appropriately adjusted to the other which results in harmony. The stories told in the

qualitative data gathering discussion groups provide more information about this harmonious relationship than a mean score of 3.43, generated from items 3, 4, 9, and 12. This was one the lowest for the three qualities and this reductionist technique does not provide an insight into the importance the women participants placed on the relational health benefits of being engaged with another sentient being. The questionnaire did not ask about touch, attachment or bonding, or feeling related to the loss of that bond. During the qualitative data gathering part of this research, the women participants were able to add to the knowledge about their engaged relationship with horses which was not possible in the restrictive questions offered by the quantitative part.

Liang et al. (2002) provided six statements (2, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14 and 15) for the questionnaire to measure the extent of empowerment and generated the highest mean score of 3.86. This figure suggests that the quality of empowerment is one of the most important relational health resources that horses provide these women. It would be difficult to infer such a rank order in the relational health qualities from the qualitative data generated in this study and I doubt there is a need to measure each against the other.

To measure the extent of connectedness to other humans item 15 “My relationship with horses has made it easier to make new friends” is removed from the empowerment group. The mean of 3.88 calculated from the twenty-six participants seems valueless when compared to the stories shared by the women participants.

The quantitative tool in this research was modified from Liang et al.’s (2002) relational health indices for human studies. It did not provide an item that would have measured the powerful theme that emerged from the qualitative part of this investigation, which is the connection to nature described by these women participants.

4 *Individual items analysed*

After analysing the participants responses as a variable I next focused on the mean scores of the items and prepared a table showing the rank of the item in terms of its mean score, see Table 9 (on page 170).

The three highest ranking statements reflect each of the three growth promoting qualities. From the authenticity domain the statement (corrected for word reversal) *‘I am comfortable sharing my deepest feelings and thoughts with my horse’* scored a mean of 4.27 with 58% of the respondents scoring a 5 for this statement. The engagement statement *‘The more time I spend*

with my horse, the closer I feel to them’ ranked second with a mean score of 4.23 and 42% of the respondent allocating 5 to the statement. The third ranked statement (corrected for word reversal) was ‘I feel I know myself better because of my connection to my horse’ was derived from the empowerment/zest domain and scored 4.20, still well above the mean of 3.75. In the chapter on authenticity you will see how the focus group participants considered their horses to be like counsellors, providing them with emotional support everyday as well as through trauma. Considering this it was surprising to note that the two lowest ranked statements were *‘I feel understood by my horse’* (2.96) and *‘My horse gives me emotional support’* (2.92), both regarded as from the empowerment domain by Liang et al. (2002) thus, there is a mismatch in this respect.

Table 9: Mean item score rank

| No. | Statement summary | Mean Rating (1-5) | Growth fostering quality | Rank |
|-----|--|-------------------|--------------------------|------|
| 6 | <i>comfortable sharing deepest feelings and thoughts</i> | 4.27 | A | 1 |
| 3 | more time - the closer I feel | 4.23 | E | 2 |
| 14 | <i>feel I know myself better</i> | 4.20 | Z | 3 |
| 10 | <i>feel energised</i> | 4.08 | Z | 4 |
| 11 | enhances my life | 4.00 | A | 5 |
| 13 | shaped my identity | 3.88 | Z | 6.5 |
| 15 | easier to make new friends | 3.88 | Z | 6.5 |
| 5 | without feeling judged | 3.85 | A | 8.5 |
| 8 | feel positively changed | 3.85 | Z | 8.5 |
| 7 | greater sense of self-worth | 3.73 | Z | 10 |
| 9 | causes me to grow | 3.62 | E | 11 |
| 2 | uplifted | 3.42 | Z | 12 |
| 1 | can be honest and real | 3.38 | A | 13 |
| 4 | feel understood | 2.96 | E | 14 |
| 12 | emotional support | 2.92 | E | 15 |

Growth fostering qualities (Liang et al., 2002) A = authenticity, E = engagement, Z = empowerment/zest

Appendix R Qualitative content analysis of seventeen emergent themes

1 *Important early memories*

They all shared a story about their earliest memories of horses in their lives. Horses were something that they were passionate about, using words like *'in love'* or *'part of me'*. Those who did not grow up in horsey families expended much energy in pursuing all things equine. They were *'besotted'* and these feelings continue into their adulthood.

2 *Horse as a friend*

As friends the horses were described as non-judgemental with unconditional acceptance of mood or appearance of the woman, also trusting and forgiving. Anecdotes supported their protection of humans but there was some debate over this apparent altruistic behaviour in favour of self-preservation on the part of the horse.

Horses sought the proximity of the women, recognising their approach, even the sound of the vehicle they drove. This recognition is inferred by the vocalisations by the horses and their behaviour in walking, trotting or galloping to meet the women. In both focus groups women describe being involved in paddock chores, like poo-picking while the horse follows and seeks attention by knocking over the barrow. Strong attachment and bonds are described, the strength of attachments were discussed with reasons provided for why some were stronger than others. It was generally agreed that it was not necessarily the first horse in their life nor the one they had the longest relationship with, Claire describes her favourite as a cantankerous old man.

3 *Horse as a companion*

Rosa actually states that her *'horse has always been [her] companion'*. The women participants describe their horse as always being accessible, a constant in their lives. They agree that if physical contact is made, activities like touching, scratching and grooming are sustained by the horse in their attempt to offer other parts of their body for such close attention, that is, their bottom. The availability of the horse to touch was an important aspect of their constancy.

4 *Woman as nurturer*

As well as demanding such attention the women participants said that others had considered that their horses were surrogate children to nurture, Stella even said her ponies were *'her babies'*.

The bond which made them feel less selfish was described, it was considered a responsibility for the life of the horse and in the case of the two older participants it had given them a feeling of being needed, a purpose for getting out and about and in one case a purpose for life itself.

5 *Horse as a counsellor*

Many revealed that they felt they could talk to their horse about anything and horses, as counsellors were a source of solace when sad or grieving. Lynn quoted *'I love the way they love me'*. The women participants said their horses provided a constant source of social support for them.

6 *Connection to other humans*

For these women participants their horses enhanced relationships with other humans. Relatives such as partners, daughters, sons, mothers and fathers were included. Zoe mentioned ancestors reinforcing some kind of notion of heritage. Horses also acted as catalysts in the formation and maintenance of friendships. With all human relationships the time spent in the shared activity can be mutually rewarding. It heighten the enjoyment and Lynne describes the pleasure she felt while watching her husband interacting with his horses, both in his enjoyment of the moment and in reminded her of his tenderness. They describe non-horsey partners being put to the test regarding their willingness to allow the woman participant to continue with horses in her life which would mean a commitment, of time and money. The mothers described supporting their daughters in their equestrian pursuits and acting as general dogsbody, or groom for their child at a competition.

Paradoxically they were both proud of their daughter's independence at preparing the horse themselves without parental assistance while the women missed the actual grooming process and close connection with the horse themselves. Role conflict dilemmas were described, one where the immediacy of the moment when a mother is actually competing and hears her child outside the ring wanting some food. Another dilemma concerns the decision to allow a child who has suffered injuries in a fall, continue competing in such a high risk sport, when they have recovered. Role conflict occurred between the bond for a horse and the parental bond. They described attachments to a previously trusted horse is tested when the horse was directly involved in an incident causing a severe injury to a child. Some of the women participants described the role of their fathers as being activity involved with the horses in the chosen life of a daughter and supportive in terms of time and money. It was a way their fathers could express love without being overly intimate. One woman participant talked of her sons and their

preference for motor bikes, she had encouraged one boy and had bought a pony for him but he would only groom the pony and soon joined his brothers and father with the bikes.

When describing competitions the women participants agreed that it can bring out the best and the worst in people and two examples of negative relationships were raised Lynne admitted to witnessing someone hitting their horse on the nose. Such brutish behaviour was not condoned by these women, even to the point of denial by Lynne who could not conceive of such behaviour. Marie witnessed parental pressure, an injured child was forced to remount and continue. Again the women participants agreed that similar incidents had occurred in front of them and they had seen it in other sports and activities where parents held unnecessarily high expectations of their child's performance. They believed these parents were living vicariously through their children.

Horses can act as social lubricants and enable horsewomen to find and make a connection with others who share the passion and I said that I had joined the local Riding Club to meet new people when I had moved to a new geographical location. The first focus group described being a member of such a club enables a shared common interest providing mutual support in caring for, training and competing with horses. At competitions friends of the women participants watched and advised them, sharing ideas and equipment to motivate each other to achieve more. Sara and Claire described a competition closeness at novice level which extended to an international camaraderie, described by Marie.

7 The challenge of competition

The challenge of competition was mostly described by the first focus group as a thrilling experience, an adrenaline rush, an activity to master, to control a powerful animal. However, the perspective of the second focus group was in terms of the special relationship between horse and woman rider, both with a common aim, described in one instance as the respectful giving of reins not the taking, as some trainers might, to be in a position of control. Most participants agreed that it was a wonderful experience and the feeling could not be taught or recreated by reading a textbook. Other outcomes from competing with horses were discussed, such as, goal setting and excitement in the moment at achieving well. They also shared stories of moments for reflection, when things had not gone to plan, it was often then that as riders they blamed themselves for the error, but taking the positive feelings from good movements, which inspired them to do better next time.

8 *For physical health*

The women participants agreed that riding horses requires a level of basic physical fitness which extends to the associated strenuous activities of husbandry, which involves grooming, moving heavy bales and food sacks, poo picking and weeding paddocks. The older participants described how age had affected their ability to do these tasks easily.

9 *For psychological well-being*

Apart from physical health, it was reported that horses provide a source of psychological well-being for the women participants. They described horses as stress reducers and Lynne uses the term '*mellowers*', paradoxically giving a time for self and a focus outside of the self, a focus away from daily grind. It was agreed that the act of grooming was relaxing, and both focus group enjoyed listening to horses grazing or munching hay at sunset. This was described by the women participants as a time of peaceful contentedness accompanied by a sense of quiet satisfaction.

10 *Connection to nature*

Part of the stress reduction was the time just sitting observing the horses in the paddock, a connection with nature. It was described as a pleasure. The women describe many hours spent just watching the interactions between their horses and examples of social learning were given. Distinctive horse personalities were described as were emerging hierarchies amongst their small herds. It was agreed that having horses to care for and ride allowed them to get out into fresh air where they directly experienced the climatic elements and a connection with other animals and plants. The daily cycle of checking, feeding and rugging was described as as well as the annual cycle of harvest and the sense of satisfaction of having the hay or barley for the winter months.

11 *Lifestyle choice - Commitment*

The women participants suggested having horses in their lives was a way of life, an active decision. Many shared stories of having given up so much, in material terms, to continue to have horses in their life. This lifestyle choice was described as the family glue. One woman participant spent summers touring around the country for the annual cycle of summer competitions and others engage in fun equestrian activities at the weekend. The theme of lifestyle choice has negative aspects of financial and time commitment and discussions were not limited to positive feelings and emotions.

They described how horses cost a great deal to purchase and maintain in health. The associated costs of feed, Veterinary care, farrier, tack and equipment, was described. In some instances secrets were kept from partners and the husband was not made fully aware of true cost. Having made the costly lifestyle choice to have horses these women described priorities that favoured of the horse. The horse was shod rather than buying a new pair of shoes, or they purchased a new winter rug for the horse instead of a new coat for themselves.

From the talk of some women the daily activities associated with horses was perceived as a chore in certain instances. Firstly if the horses were kept at a distance from their dwelling that involved transport, which cost time, especially during the short days of the winter. Secondly, a few reminded the others that the daily checking could be taxing, especially when the weather is cold, windy and wet but all showed a level of commitment to the relationship. Finally, it was agreed the chore of cleaning gear was not particular pleasant and one participant said that as a mother and wife she was charged with this task asking the others if that sounded familiar to them.

12 For fun

The women participants of the first focus group were all members of the local Riding Club and discussed with great mirth the activities at a recent games day which provided an outlet for such zest. The fun aspect was paramount as the women told each other of their experiences of the day. In the second focus group the women revealed that just being with their horses provided a source of enjoyment, one even saying she enjoyed poo-picking. With both focus groups there was enjoyment in the recounting and sharing of stories involving our horses.

13 Physical danger

The third negative issue common to both focus groups was that of the real danger that can occur to physical safety when dealing with horses. The competitors in the first focus group described pre-competition anxiety, fears and worries as they took a calculated assessment with risk of potential for injury versus adrenaline rush, they even reported the perceived threat of imminent danger associated with hunting to scare and petrify them. The fear of injury increased with age. Two participants' recounted stories of actual injuries which were severe enough to put them out of action for up to six weeks and there seemed general consensus that this was not such a problem if the rider had no responsibilities and that mothers developed a heightened sense of being incapacitated and refrained from the riskier aspects of their chosen sport. Two women

described awful injuries to their children, both owning the guilt associated with the accidents. One mother had allowed her child to continue competing at higher and higher levels, despite doubting this decision earlier and the other mother blamed herself for a management issue that led directly to a paddock accident.

Physical danger might be described as a negative quality in the women's relationship with her horses. Some faced fears successfully and a few of the women participants shared stories of bad falls that had caused severe injuries. One interpretative community was held after the death of an international competitor and it was agreed that at least she loved the sport.

14 *Grief at bereavement*

A sense of grief at the bereavement was shared as stories of the painful decision to euthanise a horse due to its age, illness or sustained injury were recounted. The sense of loss was no different than if a human friend or relative had died and associated rituals took place, such as, a quiet time to say goodbye, the marking of a burial place, and the retaining of mementos (mane/tail hair or shoe).

15 *Horse crazy teenage girls*

Although both focus groups mentioned the phenomenon of horse-crazy teenage girls reflected in the higher ratio of girls in the Pony Club, it was only in the second focus group that the phenomenon was explored and reasons for becoming horse crazy were given. The issue of why there were more horse crazy girls than boys at Pony Club events was raised and it was agreed that the phenomenon of horse crazy teenage girls existed but no shared understanding emerged. Marie posited that there was something sexual but when she felt the group did not support this she rephrased the phenomenon as something sensual. Certainly, it was discussed that relationships with such a large animal provided a level of touch and closeness that was perceived as safer by parents of girls than a relationship with a boy. The safety aspect for a teenage girl could be construed both physically (no chance of pregnancy) and emotionally (no chance of rejection).

The later onset of boy-girl relationships was discussed as Sara describes a horsey-friend who ensures all potential boyfriends also liked horses and at the least could ride. Being horse crazy as a young girl continued into the teenage years as boys took a secondary role as far as dating was concerned.

These women participants cannot ignore their bodies and what they feel, they are embodied. As such they experience menstruation and some are aware of the effect of their changing menstrual pheromones on the behaviour of their horses, particularly stallions and dominant geldings. Zoe told a story about how some stallions can actually be quite dangerous toward menstruating, attempting to mount them, and how some horse breeding studs will ban menstruating women from attending the breeding barn. Ruth's story was less charged, in the paddock, her dominant gelding would circle her and attempt to keep the other horses away from her, by lunging at them and biting them if they approached her. Others supported this change in behaviour with experiences they had and added that perhaps this gelding was trying to keep rival males away.

16 *'Gender' of rider*

If not bodies, attitude of mind will differentially affect the behaviour of horses. There was much discussion on the 'gender' of rider. Firstly this was related to the ratio of male to female riders at different stages of competition level. It has been mentioned that the perception of the women participants was that there were more girls than boys at Pony Club but now it was noted that at the top level of competition there were more males than females. The shared understanding that emerged from this was related to stereotyped gender role behaviour and expectations.

Competing in top level equestrian sports is now a profession, a career with an inherent risk of physical injury and the women participants said they thought that that such a competitor if married with children are likely to be a male. They hypothesised that attending competitions around the country/world would cause an absence from the family base and an absence in terms of inaction due to any potential injury. They agreed that he would be free to travel, having the support of a wife at home to raise the children and continue in their care if he is badly injured. The women participants had suggested the reason women stop competing after they have had children is to remain uninjured as they felt they had the ultimate responsibility to look after their children.

An interesting point to emerge from the discussion on gender role expectations was that equestrian sports are one of the few, if not the only sport where men and women compete on equal terms against each other. A competitor cited as an example at this point, a tiny female Olympic dressage rider who rode a huge Warmblood horse was the best in the world. From this developed a discussion on the factors the women participants felt made a successful dressage rider. They agreed that for the precision of dressage a rider in touch with their feminine side would succeed. They agreed that dressage and event riders would have a better rapport or relationship with the horse to enable the dance like movements to be performed. They would be kinder and have softer, yielding hands and be more empathetic. This contrasted with the traits

the women participants attributed to success in show jumping. They agreed Show Jumping, where a single competition round would last at the most a minute was a masculine sport, where stereotyped heterosexual men with their superior leg strength, using their brutish force would do well. The topic of sexual orientation of the rider was then discussed and the women participants cited examples to support these emerging views where homosexual men had indeed succeeded in Dressage and Eventing. One woman participant jokingly noted that 'feminine' Eventing (aka Three Day Event) takes days to complete, whereas 'masculine' show jumping does not require such a sustained effort.

17 The phenomenon on one-ness

In the descriptions of why they are attracted to horses the women participants believed horse to be beautiful animals, creating a magnificent sight, particularly watching them in full gallop. However, it was more than sight, it was smell and touch. Being with horses was a powerful experience of socio-sensory awareness for these women. Optimal experiences were described giving a heightened sense of awareness and the feeling of being at one with the horse during training or in competition, a form of transcendence.

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