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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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Ruth Bernadette Billany

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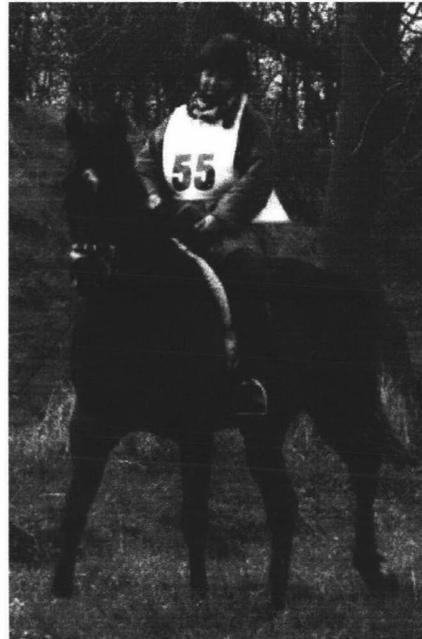
I would not have been able to write up this thesis without the support of the local Riding Club and the women participants. Thank you to the women participants who made this study special. I appreciated your time and commitment to the process.

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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[By kind permission of Rosa, a woman participant]