

**LIMINAL SPACES: THERAPEUTIC ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN HORSES AND
ADOLESCENTS**

by

STEPHANIE TERRE BLANCHE

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SUPERVISOR: D. J. KRUGER

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DECLARATION

I declare that *Liminal Spaces: Therapeutic Encounters Between Horses and Adolescents* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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STEPHANIE TERRE BLANCHE

.....

DATE

“These are the ice horses, horses
Who entered through your head, and
Then your heart,
Your beaten heart.

These are the ones who loved you.
These are the horses who have held you
So close you have become
A part of them,
An ice horse
Galloping
Into fire.”

(Harjo, 1983, p. 67)

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This is dedicated to my horses, my healers:

Toto,

Drummer Boy,

Rainbow,

Vanity,

Ranch,

Anytime,

Boss.

Without you, there would be nothing.

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Mitakuye Oyasín

SUMMARY

In this study, the intersections between Equine Assisted Psychotherapeutic interventions and adolescence are explored. Equine Assisted therapeutic work has recently gained much popularity in the field of psychology, due to many reported benefits, which include the value of the use of the horse as a tool in psychotherapy. Adolescence is acknowledged to be a difficult transitional phase, punctuated with many challenges, such as identity development. As this study is conducted by a trainee psychotherapist and researcher, the work also contains a reflexive exploration of these fields, with personal reflections regarding the researcher's own experience in the fields. This study is framed as a transtheoretical bricolage, which includes elements of reflexivity, heuristics, transpersonal, and phenomenological research approaches. Data was gathered from individual interviews with co-researchers, focus group interviews, personal reflections, and inclusion of non-verbal information from the horses who formed part of this study. Data analysis was done by means of a Thematic Data Analysis. The research findings reflect themes on different levels, which are: content themes, process themes, meta-reflections on the research process, and a meta-analysis of the research and individual developmental process which took place in the production of this work.

KEY TERMS: Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP); Equine Healing; Adolescence; Bricolage; Reflexivity; Liminality; Transitional Phase; Wounded Researcher; Medicine Wheel; Thematic Data Analysis.

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“I watch the horse.

She is running.

I am whole.

As the wild wind whips against her hair, across her back, against the top line of the horizon, I know that the wind is her very heart. It carries the song of thunder and hooves into her chest and into mine. She is running to make things right inside her; she is praying up a way to heal me.”

(Prince-Hughes, 2007, p. vii)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. BEGINNING THE BEGINNING... (INTRODUCTION TO THE INTRODUCTION)

“She may pick up her pen and follow it with her hand as it moves across the paper; she may pick up her pen and find that she’s merely herself, a woman in a housecoat holding a pen, afraid and uncertain, only mildly competent, with no idea about where to begin or what to write.” (Cunningham, 1999, p. 35)

This dissertation is a piece of work about adolescents and horses. The research question is simple enough: an exploration into the adolescent-horse relationship, what it means and what it entails. On another level, this dissertation is a scholarly journal of sorts, a reflexive space where I explore my own relationship with horses, as it is now, but also as it was during my own adolescence. Even more, it is a space where I discover the intimate link between a researcher’s subjectivities, my wounds, and how they led me into this space, this topic, this journey.

As the work progresses, it becomes something still different. I find myself questioning the politics of truth, especially how it pertains to psychotherapy, and my own journey as a psychotherapist in training. This leads to questions about equine assisted therapy, and the othering of horses to mere tools within the therapeutic space. I find myself on a ride into the way of the horse, into healing, into shamanism, into mythology and into dreams, and beyond. Finally, this exploration suggests some central themes, but it also suggests more questions for exploration.

So, this is a dissertation about adolescents and horses. But it also looks at the spaces in between; the spaces between adolescents and horses, between researchers and participants, between psychotherapy and healing, between what we are, what we were, and what we might

yet become, between what we call research and what we call life, between becoming and soul-making.

At times I use traditional methods, such as the division of this work into orderly chapters that demarcate what is to be categorised where. Other times, I interrupt my attempt at rigidity and order with quotations and interjections. As much as chapters serve to order, these interruptions serve to perturb, to stop me from becoming too comfortable in my academic role as dispassionate observer. Sometimes, the quotes suggest a change in tone or pace, at other times they invite myself, and you the reader, to open up the possibilities, to see beyond what might be expected of a 'next' chapter. Sometimes, the quotes simply invite us to look away from the formality of languaging and research, into a field that cannot be tamed by scientific research: the field of emotions, and of the soul.

Within the text, I interrupt the flow of serious writing at times, as a warning to myself to not become too bogged down in methodolatry (Lather, 2006), with poems, woven into the text. Sometimes I pause to reflect, sometimes a dream goes where no dream should ever have to go: into the heart of darkness, academia. Sometimes I let the text run with me, as an experiment by a beginner to see where it will possibly end. Where will it possibly end? I invite the reader to be open, to experience, to feel, to read, to discern...

I refuse, I refuse, I REFUSE,
To let this dissertation be boring.

Why would I make it boring, stale, one-dimensional and a replication of a million other stale pieces of work, when I have access to the beautiful inspiration of the words of Romanyshyn (1991; 1999; 2001; 2008; 2009; 2010), Hillman (1981; 1996; 2004), Stoker Signet (2008), Noy (2003), and Shulman Lorenz and Watkins (2002), to mention but a few?

I am inspired and guided by the words of those who came before me, those who weave the words of the academy skilfully and eloquently with poetry and myth, who dance between dream and reality with such steps as I can hardly follow, who indeed collapse the binaries and distinctions between the categories that separate.

“Where does a journey begin?

With a Quest(ion)?”

(Noy, 2003, p. 2)

Noy (2003), in his own research, gathering stories from backpackers in Israel, asks the questions which plagued me throughout this research process: Is writing not, instead of an act, a becoming? In the writing, are we not transforming ourselves, changing who we are as we create? Can a dissertation be understood, instead of as a dry academic bone, as a scholarly diary of sorts?

Why would I submit to writing another piece of academic fodder? No, not with the inspiration open to me, not with this drive inside to actually DO something, to actually WRITE something. Something which reflects me, my journey, and the journey of the participants in this study. Why would I write language that is dead and academic, when this work can be infused with REAL experiences, the words of those alive and living and experiencing, with dreams, with feelings, with synchronicities, with poems, with real-ness? Noy (2003) recounts how his research with backpackers, and their rites of passage of travel, came to mirror his own academic rite of passage, his symbolic journey into scholarship. “I’m thinking, writing and/in/as living... Writing like blowing air gently, writing like rekindling” (p. 11).

The process, involving myself, teenagers, horses, and a much wider ecology, also became a mirror. In the transitional period of adolescence, much is lost and much is gained, a child of twelve is not the same as the young adult of nineteen. Many minor and major rites of passage have to be negotiated. So too, I am not the one who began this process, who naively and blithely chose a research topic. I too have lost and gained, and have changed from one person to another. There is alchemy in this process of transition, in these rites of passage. There are traces of alchemy in every word written here, every story told by a teenager, in every mention of a horse.

In academic traditions that aspire to scientism and objectivities, these subjectivities and personal experiences would not be accepted. They are a vast and irreversible departure from the science that is empirical, objective; grand representations of a reality “out there”. I continue, mindful of this departure, guided by Romanyshyn (2010), and his wounded

researcher. Romanyshyn (2010) argues that far from being objective, the researcher and the topic continually dance in the circle of interpretation:

“Within this circle, the assumptions ... which a researcher brings to a work are changed in that encounter, which in the turning of the circle changes the researcher's understanding of the work, a process that continues and has an indefinite horizon. In this context, we might describe the researcher's presence as encircled subjectivity.” (p. 281)

1.2. RESEARCH AS RE-SEARCH (OR...AN EXPLANATION AS TO THE FORM OF THIS WORK)

Inasmuch as I chose a topic, the topic also chose me. Inside the encircled subjectivity, horses came to me as a child, and I to them, and as time progressed, this question of teenagers and horses chose me as I chose it. The task that lies before me then is to transform my wounding into work (Romanyshyn, 2010). In this, I wish to suggest to myself how to move ahead, in a declaration/poem, woven here and there into this text.

SO I will fire the inner critic, first and foremost.

SO I will fire this imaginary future anonymous reviewer.

SO TOO will I fire the voice inside that wishes to please my supervisors.

SO too will I fire many years of academic indoctrination telling me what is RIGHT.

Instead,

I will HONOUR the inner voice calling for resonance, for authenticity, for a thousand words so alive you could cut them and they would

bleed...

with connection, with a true sense of being alive, not merely living.

I will HONOUR the voices of those choosing to participate in this process, those choosing to co-reciprocally HONOUR me and this work by speaking, by living, by feeling and by being in this process.

I will HONOUR the horses, the ice horses who carried me and these women-children through fire.

I will HONOUR my MOTHER, the earth, who birthed me and who feeds me, who mourns me and who enlivens me.

If I cannot do this, this dissertation will be paper, mere paper. I have had enough of mere paper, of breathing only to attain future breath. I have had enough of merely being here. I choose to live, and I choose to honour LIFE among all others. LIFE and LOVE and CONNECTION and TRUE, AUTHENTIC engagement with those around me.

Mere paper is death.

I choose life.

Shulman Lorenz and Watkins (2000, p.4) articulate the discomfort in these preceding pages: “...we each carry the uneasy feeling-sense that there is much about our experience of self, other and community that can not be said, indeed, even formulated into thoughts.” They suggest that we as a human race have become caught in a mindless adherence to collective norms, to controlling monolithic thought. I feel that this is accurate, and that in academia these collective norms have called for a silencing of individual, subjective voices. For a long time, I have felt (feel) my own subjective voice silenced, and I feel internal critics continually warning me: this is not academic, this is not scientific, this is not what most dissertations look like, this is NOT RIGHT. How dare you? How dare you question the status quo that has served (who?) for so long? The voice usually becomes quite loud and hysterical. I find it silenced by the new, fresher voices in myself, and by those who came to guide me, those who wish to honour each human, love, connection, beauty and the ecology of the world around us.

Perhaps we can make research, THIS research, more alive, more connected to a real world.

“Through attention to dream, image, spontaneous thought, feeling and intuition, previously unrecognised knowings and points of view emerge, which supplant controlling monolithic thought with a vibrant, multi-layered complexity of dialogue among many.” (Schulman Lorenz & Watkins, 2000, p. 6)

Through this attention to different ways of knowing, to my encircled subjectivity, I may also finally be able to honour the words of Jung (1988, p. 103):

“You must realise that you are a link in a chain, you are not an electron suspended somewhere in space or aimlessly drifting through the cosmos. You are part of an atomic structure, and that atomic structure is part of a molecule which, with others, builds a body.”

The stage has been set.

--- o0o ---

“We have lost the third, middle position which earlier in our tradition, and in others too, was the place of the soul: a world of imagination, passion, fantasy, reflection, that is neither physical and material on one hand, nor spiritual and abstract on the other, yet bound to them both.” (Hillman, 1975, p. 68)

This work runs the risk of becoming purely a journal, the diary I kept over the extent of my journey. On the other hand, I have explained my fear that this should become a piece of heartless work with no soul or life. I believe that it can be both, an attempt at healing the Cartesian split between body and mind; between mind and soul. This healing-process is on-going within me: in the spaces between mind and heart, in the chasm between material and soul, in these openings which I am slowly attempting to draw together.

Stoker Signet (2008) suggests the mode of healing which I hope will be reflected here - but even more, that this mode of healing may run through me, through my being as a person, as a psychotherapist, as a healer, as a researcher. Instead of the abyss between one and the other becoming a stumbling block, Stoker Signet (2008) feels that transformation occurs precisely at these intersections, “the gaps, through which the soul can emerge” (p. 3). I feel too that

this is what Hillman (1975) wishes for the healing of self, others and ecology, that we find this third space between the gaps, in the in-between, from which the soul may emerge. With these in-betweens, it becomes clear that on a meta-level, this is as much a work about being in-between, as it is a work about adolescents, horses and relationships. Reflected thus far, is another gap, captured by Romanyshyn (2007, p. 6):

“In the gap between the saying and what slips away there is a sense of sadness, a feeling of mourning...To write down the soul, then, is to attend to its 'greening', to its motion and its movement, to its elusive quality which resists our efforts to enunciate it.”

This difficulty in enunciation calls for a new mode of writing and presenting. Poems, dreams, synchronicities, reflection, hesitation, uncertainty, heart, these are the calling cards of the soul, and as this is a work of a soul becoming/exploring itself and others, they will be reflected.

I begin with a dream...

In this dream, I was at my stable yard where I ride and keep my horses. A place where I had been healed and hurt in equal measures, over a decade of transformation. My home and home of my horses. Only, this stable yard was different. It was in another country, and had a strange a-temporal quality to it. I was trying to get to an arena where I had been scheduled to teach a riding lesson. For some reason, the owner of the farm kept trying to pull me away from the arena, keeping me distracted with other things. Finally, I wrenched myself away from the distractions and made my way to the arena. In the enclosure three of my students were waiting, but as I remember them as children. One, a girl included in this study. The second, a girl I knew and mentored for many years but unfortunately no longer have contact with. The third, unknown to me.

The girl I had mentored but no longer knew, whom I will call Kate, was riding a magnificent white/grey horse, with a white body and dark grey mane and tail/tale. He was the largest and most intimidating horse in the arena. As I stepped into the space, this horse went berserk. He jumped and leapt and reared and bucked until the young rider fell off. This was a madness not normally seen in horses; this was a deep madness. After she fell off, he

continued in this manner, until he fell down an open ditch which had suddenly appeared next to our riding area. In there, he fell in such a manner that he broke his neck, but he still kept fighting.

I remember in the dream, telling the girl and her mother to give up, he was going to die. Even as I said this I watched him still fight, watched his terrified eyes and his straining nostrils. Finally, he died.

In this a-temporal, a-spacial dream place, we wanted to bury his corpse, but were prevented from doing so by the laws of the country. We had to cross into another space to bury him, but could only do so if we took pieces of him. I then cut pieces off the horse, and eventually we were able to cross over into the other space to bury the horse.

--- o0o ---

Why would I choose to open with such a gruesome dream?

Stoker Signet (2008) calls our attention to dream-tending being a way of healing, and of soul-making. Freud, Jung and Hillman urged us to pay attention to our dreams, being far from mere daytime unsorted debris, instead a mode of reaching deeper into ourselves, and into the soul of the world. Miller (in Stoker Signet, 2008, p. 17) calls our minds and hearts again to the gaps to be tended: "Images host for us a middle zone, the between, with matter/concrete below it and spirit/abstract above it." Surely, I could not close myself to such an encounter, one which provided so clear a bridge, a doorway - into and between...

Upon waking the next morning, I was puzzled and upset by this vision my unconscious had chosen to provoke me with. My first port of call was to look at symbolism and mythology involving white horses.

I was shocked and surprised by what I found. First, the vision of the white horse is often linked to the horse goddess Epona. This was startling in itself, but even more so for the connotations it carried. Linda Kohanov (2001) spoke of such prophetic, collective-unconscious invoking dreams when she started her journey towards the heart of the horse. Indeed, this human/horse healer chose to name her equine-assisted psychotherapy

organisation after the goddess Epona. This to me seemed a powerful affirmation from my inside, as well as those beyond: Get started. You are on the right track. This journey will still be painful and confusing, but get started. Get started. Get started...

Second, I was disturbed by the terrible injury to the horse, and what this could mean to me. In my own life, I was traversing difficulties both personally and with my horses, and I wondered if it simply alluded to the trauma I felt there. Yet the white horse tormented me... In my reading I found references to white horses pulling chariots to the sun, being ridden by warrior heroes, symbolising fertility, and having associations with end-times and saviours. Very interestingly, I found that white horses were associated too with transcendence. Transcendence of the normal world, and mediation between the land of the living and the land of the dead. This tickled me greatly. Then, I found too that Jung associated horse dreams with the development of psychic ability (Dunne, 2000).

Half a day later, by a strange synchronicity, I came upon an article, *“When a “white horse”, is not a “horse”* (Thompson, 1995). Initially, I disregarded it. That evening, I had another dream. The same girl, Kate, and her mother featured again. This time, I was teaching her an individual lesson, and she was riding my horse, a bay gelding called Africa. This lesson was a very uncomfortable affair, because I resented teaching her on my horse, and because the arena we were using was very small, and we kept getting into uncomfortable angles where the horse could not move properly. This was the entirety of the dream.

Then, the link of “When a “white horse”, is not a “Horse”, resonated with me again. Yes, the white horse was important, and it drew me for a reason. But Kate and her mother came back another night, and so did a horse, in a very similar circumstance, as if a story was being insisted upon and I wasn't quite getting it. What was I not getting?

What am I not getting?

1.3. CONTEXT

Any piece of work is embedded in some deeper bedrock, and can never be seen in isolation

from this background. Here follows a brief snapshot of the background of the researcher and the research.

I am currently twenty eight years old. I am busy with an internship as a clinical psychologist at an acute psychiatric hospital. I am busy exploring the world of shamanism and healing, mostly through my own healing experiences which dot the landscape of this dissertation, and will be signposted at times. I am also a woman who runs with horses, and I have no other way to describe my relationship with horses, as it is currently in a state of flux and can only be represented by movement.

Until recently, I was completing my two year master's degree in Clinical Psychology at the University of South Africa. I count the day that I was selected for this course as the day my life started again, because everything changed on that day, a little after my twenty-sixth birthday. During this course, I was poked, prodded, provoked, perturbed, and any other possible word for horribly shaken out of my belief that I knew what life was. At the same time, I was held, I was supported, I was loved, I was welcomed, I found my home. I met and am meeting people through strange signs and synchronicities, people I am recognising as my tribe, my family, my home. These people helped me to escape a self-prescribed sentence of depression, and helped me stumble my way onto my calling.

This dissertation mirrors the journey from that first day of selection, to the last day of writing, almost three years later. First, it mirrors my turns inward and away (Krakauer, 1998), or as Hillman (1981, p. 33) describes it, a “vertical withdrawal” and an “emptying out”, which was necessary for an opening to a new listening, both inward and outward. A large portion of this work was written during this phase, which proved to be the darkness from which the rest of my life was born. As I learned to listen differently, I realised that the world had been whispering from everywhere, through my psyche and my soul, in dreams, poems, synchronicities, symbols, metaphors, friends and guides. A large portion of this work also represents my excitement at hearing new voices and music, which at times became quite disorganised but always exciting and fun! The last sections, after the interjection, represent a semblance of organisation, of higher ability to work with my new hearing, and me settling more comfortably into my role as neophyte therapist. The last sections also represent an opening into a new process, one which I cannot map as I am still too deeply embedded in this process, but one that I detect glimmers of as I read over the final words.

1.4. OUTLINE

Chapter two is a discussion of the literature regarding equine assisted therapy and healing, as well as an attempt to reframe adolescence. In this chapter, I look at the question of why horses have become so popular in therapy and healing, some of the suggestions as to why horses are such effective therapists, as well as links between current schools of psychotherapy and equine healing. Finally, I suggest some bridges between therapy and healing, and some difficulties I have encountered in the tensions between the two worlds.

Chapter three represents my trawling through method, which includes my understandings (or lack thereof) of ontology, an exploration and attempt at linking hermeneutic phenomenology and heuristic inquiry, and an interruption pointing out the tensions between theoretical borders. Furthermore, I look at research from the perspective of the wounded healer, and at research as representing a journey of individuation, as I have suggested in the preceding section. In this section, I also outline the practical aspects of my data collection.

Chapter four enters into the themes of the data in detail, discussing each theme thoroughly and outlining the three categories of themes, namely themes that deal with content, themes that deal with the process of the work, and finally themes that are meta-reflections of the process and ethical considerations which arose during the work. This chapter contains both themes and their discussions, as I found it more workable to integrate the two sections so as to not create artificial separations.

Chapter five offers a brief discussion on the experience of the process in retrospect, as well as a look at an organising, or meta-theme, which seems to capture the entire journey effectively.

Chapter six contains the closing words of this dissertation exploration, engages some of the questions opened during the course of this study, asks some further questions regarding further research, and touches upon issues of validity.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

“Animals have hands. Humans do too. There is a space between the worlds. We use those hands to be in that space, being in the space between the worlds.”

This, too, was a dream. These words had come to me months before, disembodied, hollow, echoing over the expanse of an otherwise empty mind/soul-space. I feel that they are very important. They act as a beacon to me, a cosmic and psychic reminder: This is right, this is right. Get to it. All the signs are right. Do the work.

This is the dreamline that runs central to this entire journey. The golden thread that binds.

Kohanov (2001, p. xx) sets the tone for this quest: “I weave my journey with the odysseys of many two-legged and four-legged teachers who repeatedly reminded me that the mysteries of life, the most potent gifts of existence, quite often arrive on the backs of black horses.” A simple sentence, but it captures all the elements of what is to be found in this review of the literature. In this chapter, I will consider the journeys of both four-legged teachers, horses, as well as two-legged teachers, those who interact with horses and write about what that means. While attempting to present useful and accurate literature, I wish too to weave in more subtle notes into this tapestry, those which honour the “mysteries of life” and the “potent gifts of existence”. These are such colours and experiences as the dreams that carried me into this work, the gentle and sometimes shocking synchronicities which supported me and gave me a kick in the posterior when necessary, and the magic of the bond between a teenager and her horse.

The odysseys of humans and horses have been intertwined as a strand of ecological DNA, running parallel, each informing the other continually throughout history. The shape of

humans today would not have been what it was, were it not for horses; likewise, horses are what they are today due to their continual interaction with the human race. Following the strands of mythology and history, we see two lives continually bound in orbit.

Modern horse, *Equus Caballus*, is generally believed to have evolved from a smallish creature that roamed the ancient earth, called *Eohippus* (Johnson, 1968). Translated from Greek, *Eohippus* means “dawn horse”. The dawn horse changed over the course of 60 million years, to the modern horse we know today. It is in this form of *Equus Caballus* that it is speculated that the human race and horses first met. Early horse served the purpose of food and fur to early man, and later, horses served as means of transportation in all spheres of life, from mail-deliveries to cavalry (Johnson, 1968; Kane, 2004).

Kane (2004) argues that with modernisation, we no longer needed horses for the mundane tasks of existence, and that it is only now that we may engage with horses on a different level, one characterised by relational connection, and deeper communication. Although I agree that we are now more than ever poised to experience the nature of the horse deeply and authentically, I suggest that this relationship has been felt throughout human history, expressed through different mediums, such as story-telling from different generations in different forms: cave art, mythology, fantasy, poetry, films and books.

In line with this, Game (2001, p. 1) suggests that we look at our relationships with horses in a different way, and that we should honour the connections between humans and horses as a “creative process of coming to be”. This coming to be is experienced through mutual resonance between the species, which she describes as, “we are always already part horse, and horses, part human; there is no such thing as pure horse or pure human” (Game, 2001, p. 1). Haas (2004) states emphatically that horses are in her blood, and I suspect Game (2001) would extend this metaphor: we, too, are in their blood.

Haas (2004) tells the story of Mount Helicon in Greek mythology. On Mount Helicon is a spring, called Hippocrene, which means fountain of the horse. According to the myth, the spring was created by Pegasus, the winged horse, who stepped off earth at this point to thrust off into the sky. As I step off here, into this exploration, I wish to keep these words close to my heart, to come to be in myself; to investigate the coming to be of others in horses.

Poets,
forever,
drink
from that high fountain,
and tell tales of
gods and goddesses,
and horses.
(Haas, 2001, p. 62)

2.2. WHY HORSES? FIRST VERSION

Game (2001) captures my desire for this work, my personal drive, succinctly, when she says that she is “interested in [...] a universal connectedness experienced in an eternal realm beyond *my* personal history” (p. 2). I am interested because of my own personal history and present connection with horses. So, too, because there is a history between teenagers and horses which cannot be denied, and a present, where much connection and healing is taking place. Beyond that, I am interested in the connectedness experienced between the two species, human and horse. Game (2001, p. 3) encapsulates this connectedness in the idea of “entraining”, describing this connection as the development of receptivity, the letting-go of will and self-consciousness, of ego. This receptivity allows us, people and horses, to entrain together with human-horse rhythms. This entraining, this tuning in with the other, is central to the experience of the human-horse bond, the tie that binds.

Game (2001) likens this feeling of complete connection, complete becoming of the other, to Bachelard's (1969) description of inhabitation. Whether riding or being with the horse on the ground, the feeling of togetherness allows us to feel that we live in horses as they live in us.

It is the experience of this inhabitation that I wish to explore with the participants of this study. Having felt this rapture (Clement, 1994), and the healing that comes with this surrender to the horse, having seen it in others, it seems to me that the answer to “Why horses?”, subjectively, is clearly visible. Hempfling (2001, p. 4) captures this inhabitation

and surrender:

“The horse symbolises a deep fundamental trust in allowing-oneself-to-be-carried.
This means opening oneself to life, allowing oneself to be carried in the flow of life.”

This journey of discovery is on-going. From broad concept to research proposal to writing to this moment of reading, it cannot ever be considered static. It would be a disservice to the work, the participants, and future readers to consider this work as done, as having reached a point of completion. At best, I may provide a snapshot, of this journey that the participants and I have taken with horses. This represents a point of punctuation at a particular time, and is subject to change as we all change. Reader beware then, just as the same river can never be stepped into twice, this too is a journey that is continuously becoming...

2.3. WHY HORSES?

SECOND VERSION

I hear the voices coming back already. I hear the voices calling me back from the edge.

The voices of my lecturers, drilled into me over the years. (“This isn't up to standard, this is barely academic. You can do better, Stephanie. We've seen your writing up to now, and this has pleased us and those that matter. Where is the Old Stephanie?”)

Even the voices of those close to me, who support me in this journey. (“What is this? All this time spent and this is the rambling diatribe I am exposed to? She can do better...”)

I want to silence all those voices.

I wish, for once, to hear no voice but my own.

I wish, for once, to write for no eyes but my own.

I wish to hear my own voice.

How can I respect the pure and honest voices of others in this work, if I cannot even respect my own? How can I expect of them to risk themselves, to speak up about their lives, if I cannot risk myself, if I cannot simply say my say. (“To hell with it all, I’m doing this. I am doing this. I am going.”)

The horse has four legs,
and fifty-five possible gaits.
European horsemen
...
have declared three gaits
and three gaits only
to be natural;
walk, trot, gallop
(and canter, which is a slow gallop).
The rest must be eradicated.
(Haas, 2004, p. 113)

2.4. HORSES AS CO-THERAPISTS

The use of horses has recently become popular in physical therapy and psychotherapeutic circles. Reported benefits include physical, emotional, behavioural, developmental, social and psychological changes, to name but a few. The use of horse as facilitator and co-therapist in therapeutic systems is based on the nature of the horse - an animal capable of incredibly sensitive communication, mirroring of human behaviour, and providing accurate and instant feedback in a therapeutic session. Furthermore, horses provide by their nature the conditions of worth for therapy: warmth, empathy and unconditional positive regard.

Recently, many international studies have surfaced focussing on the value of equine assisted psychotherapy (EAP) and hippotherapy (physical therapy with horses). Many of these studies report the improvements mentioned above in clients. Most of these studies focus on therapy with horses being brief - and are based on the inherent therapeutic value of the horse as co-therapist, and a skilled physical or psychological therapist. In South Africa, there are a

small number of studies, but there is still need for more research in this field specifically focussed on South African populations (see Bronkhorst (2006); Hurwitz (2013)).

What is it about the bond between horse and human, and specifically between adolescent and horse, that is so powerful? These questions have been asked by many: Kohanov (2001; 2003; 2007), Roberts (1997; 2004), Soren (2001), Llewellyn (2007) and Coates (2008), among others. In academia, many have explored the benefits and value of EAP, such as the work done by Helfer (2006), Sudekum Trotter, Chandler, Goodwin-Bond and Casey (2008), Cuffari Toukonen (2011) and Sudekum Trotter (2012). However, it is my feeling that most studies have focussed heavily on the benefits of EAP, but neglected the means by which these benefits were attained: the bond between horse and human. Cuffari Toukonen (2011) focussed specifically on the human-horse bond, yet the findings of this study were rather superficial, and none of the deeper, more soulful elements of the equine-human bond came to light. Further, very few studies done have truly given word to those central to the experience: human and horse, with the exception of work done by Brandt (2004), Birke (2008) and Burgon (2003; 2011a; 2011b).

Adolescence is a phase of life characterised by much change and transition, and is widely acknowledged as a difficult transitional phase from childhood to young adulthood. In this study I wish to experience and explore this horse-human bond more closely, with the hope of gaining some insight into the psychotherapeutic worth of horses in helping adolescents traversing a difficult transitional phase in life. Further, I hope to provide a new angle of approach to horse-related therapeutic research. Instead of an exclusive focus on the horse as co-therapist with inherent therapeutic value, the goal of this study is to examine the value of the bond between horse and human, specifically, the value of this bond between horse and adolescent.

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“I could only suppose that there is some unique rapport, a special relationship, between man and horse which does not exist with any other animal...” (Blake, 1975, p. 27)

Animals have long been thought to aid humans both physically and emotionally (McCardle,

McCune, Griffin, Esposito & Freund, 2011). Throughout history, humans and horses have existed along parallel paths, but it is only recently that horses have been recognised and used in experiential interventions in the helping professions (Virdine, Owen-Smith & Faulkner, 2002; Worms, 2009). Kohanov (2001, p. xv), in *The Tao of Equus*, pondered the nature of the horse, and the amazing connections horses have made with humans:

“Do horses make choices? Do they have strong wills of their own? How do they seem to know what people are thinking and feeling? Are they psychic, or do they simply read the body language of their owners at a highly sophisticated level? Are horses spiritual beings with a destiny all their own? If so, how is this destiny intertwined with humanity's future...?”

In many ways, the work done by Linda Kohanov (2001; 2003; 2007; 2013) with equine-assisted healing has opened the door for all debate and research that followed. Here was a voice willing to ask, is there more to the link between horses and humans, more than mere utilitarian value, more than physical interaction and enjoyment, more than most are willing to admit? Most involved with horses, be it training, breeding, instructing, joy-riding or therapy, have miraculous stories of healing. Healing in humans. Healing in horses. And healing in the interaction between the two.

Yet most of us have been willing to shelve these miraculous stories, to not look too closely at them, to disregard them as oddities or luck. We have all been unwilling to ask these uncomfortable questions: What really lies behind the human horse bond? How are horses so intrinsically linked to us, across the span of millions of years? What implications will this link have for us as humans, for the ecology of a wider world, in dire need of healing? Mostly, I think, we have been afraid of the answers.

2.5. EQUINE HEALING (OPENING THE WINDOWS...)

Since the small revolution which erupted in the wake of work done by Linda Kohanov, we have slowly worked towards asking ourselves what horses really mean to humanity. Some of these questions have come in the form of increased use of horses in the field of mental health.

More and more, equine-assisted interventions are used for healing in many fields. These interventions include: equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP), equine-facilitated therapy (EFT), hippotherapy, and equine-facilitated learning (EFL) (Worms, 2009). There is some overlap in these fields, which creates understandable confusion in the literature. Furthermore, some terms are used to mean one particular area of work internationally, but something different in the context of South African horse-related interventions.

I will briefly define these different interventions, before introducing my own suggestion regarding language, which will be used through the remainder of this work. Both EAP and EFT are considered to be experiential psychotherapies (Schultz, 2005). According to Schultz (2005), their similarities include the use of the horse in both, and the presence of either groups or individuals, the presence of a trained therapist, as well as a variety of horse-related activities, such as handling, lunging, grooming and possibly riding. However, EAP focusses more specifically on interacting on the ground with a horse, which provides opportunities for growth, learning and psychosocial change to take place (Masters, 2010; Schultz, 2005; Virdine et al, 2002). Schultz, Remick-Barlow and Robbins (2007, p. 265) state that “equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP) is a specialised form of psychotherapy using the horse as a therapeutic tool”. By contrast, EFT often includes vaulting (exercises done on the back of a moving horse) and places its focus more on ridden work than work on the ground (Schultz, 2005). According to Schultz (2005), the challenges of riding a horse, as well as the physical movement of the horse, also form part of the therapeutic worth of working with horses.

Equine-facilitated learning (EFL), sometimes also called equine-assisted learning, is defined as a horse-related experience which draws on the core concepts of experiential learning, which means that learning takes place through hands-on experience (Dell, Chalmers, Dell, Sauve & MacKinnon, 2008). EFL is generally used in educational programs, often in a group context (Dell et al., 2008). Hippotherapy is a form of physical therapy, where individuals with special physical needs are aided through work with a horse (Frewin & Gardiner, 2005).

It is the goal of this project to not restrict its scope to a particular type of intervention. However, in the interest of practicality, and in order to avoid confusion, there will be less focus on Hippotherapy-related gains of a physical nature, and more focus on psychological, emotional and social aspects, such as those that would be addressed within EAP and EFT.

Here, I wish to introduce the idea of equine healing. I suggest this in order to avoid the strict dichotomy-inducing nature of many harsh clinical terms, in order to allow for broader understandings of healing to be given place in the space of this work. This term is not meant to usurp the use of any other, respected and very powerful helping horse interventions. Further, I do not wish to cause further confusion regarding terminology. Instead, I wish to open the windows, to broaden the scope, to allow in some light and air, and let alternative understandings of healing, and human-horse relationships, enter without fear of 'where they fit'.

Haas (2004, p. 164) elegantly captures the difficulty of definition, and the beauty of equine healing, in the poem, 'Therapeutic'.

Height,
large warmth,
scent rising,
motion carried up
moving the body
that has never moved itself,
and the gracefulness of the animal
and the animalness of the grace -
she smiles.
The horse and I walk on.

Kohanov (2001, p. xvii) may again be asked to open the field for me, with words which I feel are a good starting point in equine healing:

“The Tao of Equus essentially translates to 'the way of the horse', while emphasising the healing and transformational qualities of this path. Interacting with these animals can be immensely therapeutic physically, mentally and spiritually, helping people awaken long-forgotten abilities that are capable of healing the imbalances of modern life. At a time when horses are no longer required to work in our fields and carry us to war, they can do something arguably more important – work on us.”

Soren (2001) feels that her first time on horseback may be likened to having gone to heaven,

and having found her element. Here is some kind of healing, some feeling of transformation which may not be easily quantified into a category of psychotherapy, but powerful and profoundly life-changing none-the-less, “Something woke up in me after that first ride, a dawning realisation that the world is only a mirror of ourselves” (Soren, 2001, p. 5).

Eckles (2007) speaks of the intense connection between herself and her pony, Scout, who carried her physically, emotionally and spiritually through a diagnosis of retinal disease, and eventual blindness. She speaks of the many roles the pony took, “[he] became my warrior, my defender, and my confidant” (p. 89), and how he “grew to know me better than I knew myself” (p. 89). This relationship is mirrored in Scout, the pony, who himself was healed through the power of the relationship, “he was no longer a scrawny, skinny, and scared horse; he was a strong, radiant warrior ready to defend a kingdom in battle” (p. 89). Scout went well beyond the call of duty, and well beyond the scope of what could be considered equine-assisted therapy, carrying his near-sightless rider on paths she was no longer able to steer him along, moving with deliberate caution and the intention to protect his vulnerable rider. This level of trust was what carried rider and horse through many years of close bond and healing, which Eckles (2007, p. 91) describes as “he read my heart, sensed my pain, and cried my tears”.

These stories all capture the essence of equine healing, but might have been excluded by more narrow definitions such as those of equine-assisted psychotherapy. I wish to reiterate again that this is not to diminish the importance or place of other equine-assisted mental and physical interventions. Instead, by opening this space for more diverse voices to be heard, we may be able to contribute to these fields. By opening the space to allow teenagers to speak of their remarkable bonds with horses, we may be able to hear these stories for the first time, and allow these stories of equine healing to assist in the development of more effective equine-assisted psychotherapies and other mental health interventions.

Birke and Brandt (2009) speak of this bond as a oneness with horse, “a kind of fluid intersubjectivity” (p. 196). This fluid intersubjectivity is found in an intimacy with the horses we are in relationship with, created through an embodied connection with the animal, which brings about change in both bodies. These researchers also emphasise that this embodiment may be experienced differently in different contexts, and that this elusive feeling of oneness “is also an embodiment that could carry a multitude of meanings and fluidities” (p. 196).

Interestingly, Birke and Brandt (2009), inasmuch as they emphasise the embodied experience of oneness with the horse, also draw attention to the fact that this act of connection may allow us a mode of transcendence, allowing us to move briefly beyond mere human modes of conduct and being. This is one of the rare references in academic equine literature to transcendence beyond material, to spiritual; beyond individual, to ecological. Garcia (2010) also draws our hearts and minds to broader experiences of healing with horses, to equine healing on different levels, including connection and healing within the broader ecology:

“Other areas of the horse-human experience...include heightened awareness of and connection with nature, and transpersonal experiences such as meditative states, mystical experiences, and telepathy...the horse-human relationship may facilitate a positive re-framing of the individual's relationship to self, to others, and to the greater ecology of the Earth.” (p. 86)

It is in the spirit of this opening to difference and wider experience that I wish to proceed, in order to be sensitive to equine healing in forms both recognised by mainstream therapy, and those we are just beginning to perceive and understand.

2.6. HEALING THROUGH THE WAY OF THE HORSE

“I began a dangerous rebellion. I snuck out at night and ran away from home. I experimented with alcohol, cigarettes, purging, cutting, and hitting myself – anything to distract myself from my suffering. From the pit of my despair, I wrote dark poems and suicide notes. I was an angry adolescent, poisoned by self-loathing. During this difficult time, I began to train horses...” (Hoffman, 2007, p. 170)

Heather Hoffman (2007) writes this account of her own difficult adolescence. Her story is her own, but also the story of many other teenagers, and certainly my own story, too. Each story different, each story unique, but with one central feature: the bond with a horse. This bond, somehow powerful enough in the teenage life to lift the spirit from darkness into healing. This magic of the horse bond allowed Hoffman to survive her “blackest moments”(p. 173), and allows many to do the same, and more, not only to survive, but to

thrive. Hoffman (2007), changed forever by her bond with her horse, Pal, eventually chose a career in equine-assisted psychotherapy, crediting as “a model for me in the healing process” (p. 175).

Equine-related therapies form part of a larger group of experiential therapies called Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) (McCardle et al., 2011; Schultz, 2005). Horses are specifically used in therapy for a great number of reasons, and provide therapeutic worth of a different kind to those gains seen with other animals (Schultz, 2005).

Why horses? Many suggestions have been forwarded. Schultz (2005) argues that the sheer size difference between humans and horses is a factor, allowing individuals to learn to deal with their fear of horses, and using this learning as a metaphor for dealing with overwhelming and intimidating struggles in everyday life. Harrison (2007) reflects this:

“Then I got to ride. Raised sixteen hands above the ground, I felt at once terrified and on top of the world” (p. 167).

In addition, the size and intimidating nature of the horse require a measure of attentiveness and 'being-present' for the sake of safety, something many individuals who present for therapy struggle with (Frewin & Gardiner, 2005). Both on the ground and ridden, the sheer size of a horse, even a small horse, presents a challenge.

“A spirited stallion ten times the size of the average human being inspires feelings of awe and even fear in observers, but first impressions can be deceiving. This kind of horse-power is not effectively tamed through intimidation or coercion.” (Kohanov, 2001, p. xv)

This challenge is further heightened when we realise that a horse cannot be controlled or forced to do anything. Initially, instinct instructs us that force must match force, and that we must try to strong-arm a horse into co-operation. It is a very powerful realisation that no horse, of any size, can be made to do something. There are other ways of dealing with size and power, as all those who have worked with horses can attest.

Many equine-assisted psychotherapy programmes utilise the size of the horse, in different

creative ways. Chapman (2012) describes how useful sheer size can be in an equine-assisted healing intervention. She describes how from the first session, the size of a horse creates unique challenges for a client. First, we must learn how to interact with a horse not through force or power, but through tapping into our own energies and 'out-of-the-box' thinking and feeling skills. Horses do not respond well to pretence, so when we try to be confident and boss it about, the horse will become more stubborn. Only once we tune into our “core self” (Chapman, 2012, p. 4), will the horse respond to the lightest touch, or even be controlled merely through body language, spoken language, and mental intention. This is a startling and transforming realisation to many of us, who have grown up in a world where masculine energies of 'might is right' have been dominant.

Horses live naturally as herd animals, relying on the collective to survive, which has imbued them with a powerful sense of intuition and sensitivity (Dell et al., 2008). Learning to understand the horse as part of the collective is especially valuable. This sense of collective living must be understood if we are to understand the horse. Easily said, but not so easily done in our Western society, which honours individuality above all else. Beyond this understanding of the horse as part of the collective, it is immensely challenging for us as humans to feel that sense of connection, to realise that:

“Together we stand

Atomised we fall.”

(Kruger, 2011, personal communication)

In mythology, horses have often symbolically represented transcendence, and as in my dream, it seems that here, this metaphor is especially powerful. Kane (2004) feels that horses, as they are true life bearers of riders, may also be bearers between dream and reality, between isolation and connection, between being an island and realising that “no man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main” (Donne, 2006, p. 318). Horses may serve as symbolic connections between our Western, self-imposed radical individualism, and becoming sensitive to our part in the ecology of Earth.

Garcia (2010) encountered this sense of transcendence too, that “horse-human encounters can produce experiences that are both intellectual and fully embodied” (p. 87). As with Bachelard's (1969) sense of inhabitation, and Berman's (1981, p. 76) “totality of experience”

and “sensuous intellect”, Garcia (2010) suggests that these total experiences that we encounter with horses may result in greater feelings of connection with the world around us, and a deeper understanding of our “ecological self” (p. 87). Perhaps even in the transformational writing taking place here, horses may pave the way to a feeling of “sensuous intellect”, a bridge between cold intellect and beating heart and breathing soul.

Horses, through their intimate relationship with their own collective, offer us a mode of reconnection with our own lost collective. Kohanov (2001) feels that this is the essence of true healing, to move from isolation to reconnecting with the world we have felt so estranged from. Schoen (2001) proposes that co-species healing, in this case human and horse, is a process by which we are allowed to become whole, to acknowledge through the help of the horse that we do not stand in opposition to the world, or to nature, but that we are part of the whole of the Earth.

“Perhaps, through our connection with animals, we are stimulating some deeply buried aspect of nature within us, rekindling a lost connection that allows us to be more than solitary creatures, but part of something greater – and therefore more healthy, more whole.” (Schoen, 2001, p. 164)

As herd animals, horses have also become intensely sensitive to those around them, and are able to communicate in ways that we as humans are only now starting to notice. Within the herd, horses are at all times in-tune with their companions around them, both for the sense of togetherness, but also for survival. This intuition and sensitivity is highly useful as a therapeutic modality, where the horse responds to a human's verbal as well as non-verbal cues, providing very direct and honest feedback as to an individual's behaviour (Dell et al., 2008).

In Garcia's (2010) opinion, this subtle communication is vital to the healing bond between human and horse: “Communication is the underlying structure for understanding *what* is evoked in the human partner, as well as for understanding *how* horse-human encounters promote learning, healing, inner growth, and heightened awareness of *self and other*” (p. 87, original italics). Although horses do respond to verbal cues from humans, most communication that takes place between humans and horses takes place on another level entirely.

Some (e.g. Marks, 2005) feel that this communication on a non-verbal level takes place by means of incredibly subtle body-language and reading of non-verbal cues. I agree that much communication between humans and horses takes place on the level of body language, and learning to read one another on a physical level. However, I feel that communication, true inhabitation, tuning-in with the horse, takes place in a space beyond this, and that true connection with the horse forces us to engage in ways that we have chosen to ignore, or have chosen to believe to be impossible. Garcia (2010) argues that this communication is not so much non-verbal, as it should be considered “pre-verbal” (p. 87). Berman (1981, p. 343) describes this communication as an immersion, and a becoming aware that “everything in the universe is alive and interrelated, and that we know the world through direct identification with it, or immersion in its phenomena”.

Soren (2001) gives us a brief glimpse of this immersion-communication, drawing the mind into a space beyond reason and logic with a Zen poem:

“You cannot get it by taking thought:
You cannot get it by not taking thought.” (p. 202)

I am startled by how much these simple lines reflect the difficulty of truly capturing words and thoughts onto paper, how much this becoming through writing has plagued this wounded researcher. Again, horses provide both a bridge and a metaphor, linking the verbal with the non-verbal, the rational with the pre-verbal. Articulating that which is verbal is one thing, but to try and express that which is inherently not amenable to being articulated, becomes a challenge. Perhaps it is best not to try too hard to express it in words, but instead to capture it in feeling, as the poet T. S. Eliot (1925, p. 190) does:

“Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision,
...
Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence.”

As much as I struggle at times to articulate the feeling behind equine healing, it is as difficult to explain or express in real life the magical communication and healing which occurs between a teenager and her horse.

Non-verbal immersion-communication, Frewin and Gardiner (2005, p. 17) suggest, allow for the development of healing modalities between horse and human, such as when “the horse responds to the immediacy of your intent and your behaviour, and does so without assumption or criticism”. This intuition also makes a horse very sensitive to incongruence in humans, which is reflected in confusion in the horse. This immediate feedback is often called 'mirroring', implying that the horse will only give to an individual what the individual gives to the horse, both behaviourally and emotionally (Kohanov, 2001). Gracia (2010) describes this mirroring process as an informational feedback loop between human and horse, with the horse giving its human co-interactor very accurate and very immediate feedback as to her inner emotional and mental states.

Marks (2005) describes this mirroring through an old English proverb: show me your horse, and I will show you who you are. Kohanov (2001) elaborates on this, calling every horse a reflecting pool of the person that we are. Even more, this reflection is done without judgement or prejudice,

“In its supreme equanimity, the lake behind the black horse's eyes contained the healing waters of transformation, its fluid vision embracing flowers blooming, vultures preening, and my own, jagged, self-indulgent thought process. The spring-fed pond simply reflected what was, providing me with an oasis of clarity and peace in which to expand my awareness.” (Kohanov, 2001, p. 83)

Nicoll (2005, p. 1) bridges immersion-communication and mirroring in equine healing with the words:

“The magic of the human-animal bond is that this work is done with limited language, with only the connection of heart and soul. The beauty of this emotional dance is that my soul friends have often proved the perfect mirror into my own darkness and still have found me lovable.”

Masters (2010) points out that horses are prey animals, which means that they tend not to trust easily. This provides an interesting challenge to the human individual, who must through congruence, consistency and kindness gain a horse's trust and respect. Again, this may be used as a metaphor for situations in real life where individuals struggle with these challenges in their 'real-life'. A horse cannot be bullied, due to its emotional nature and size, and therefore it requires 'out of the box' thinking in order to interact successfully with a horse, drawing upon humans' capacity to broaden their problem solving skills and role repertoire.

Beyond broadening horizons and challenging their human counterparts to thinking in new ways, finding ways of earning a horse's trust also link to we ourselves learning to trust others. Chapman (2012) feels that this element of learning to trust is central to equine-assisted psychotherapy, where situations with the horse call for us to trust our own judgement regarding what we choose to do with a horse. In learning to trust what we do with a horse through equine healing, we may expand these skills into our wider world, learning to trust what we do in our everyday lives, as well as our interactions with others.

“Human-horse interaction can facilitate personal exploration of feelings, powers of intuition and energy understandings of self, nature, relationships and communication” (Torres, Soler, Rothe, Vega & Pazos, 2004, p. 375).

Torres et al. (2004) further emphasise that horses can help humans with emotional growth and an enhanced feeling of self-efficacy and self-esteem, leading to an overall improvement in quality of life. This is reiterated by Burgon (2011, p. 16), who indicates that horse-related therapies can provide a broad set of psychosocial benefits “such as an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem, mental and physical health benefits, gains in self-awareness and behavioural modification, and psychotherapeutic benefits including links to attachment theory and the therapeutic relationship”.

Many more psychosocial and emotional benefits are suggested by various horse-assisted therapy programs (EAGALA, 2013; Horses Help, 2013). These include:

1. Improvement of general sense of well-being.
2. Improved self-confidence.
3. Increased interest in the outside world.

4. Increased interest in one's own life.
5. Improved risk-taking abilities (including mastery of fear).
6. Development of patience.
7. Emotional control and self-discipline.
8. Sense of normality.
9. Expansion of locus of control.
10. Friendship development.
11. Increased range of experiences (including wider problem solving skills and the development of a broader role repertoire).
12. Enjoyment.

I feel that by their nature, horses provide the conditions of worth, which allow for a therapeutic relationship to develop, as described by Rogerian Client-Centered Therapy. These are the core conditions which are both necessary and sufficient for an effective therapeutic relationship to develop (Chardonnnens, 2009; Corey, 2005). These conditions of worth are: congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathy. Congruence implies authenticity and honesty, without the presence of a false front (Corey, 2005). Unconditional positive regard is simply caring which is non-judgemental. As mentioned earlier, horses respond in a very intuitive, direct manner, and by their animal nature, are not able to deceive or judge in the same way humans do. Horses therefore meet the conditions of worth of congruence and unconditional positive regard. The third condition of worth is empathy, defined as the ability to sense subjective experience with sensitivity and accuracy. Although horses are not able to convey verbal empathy, they provide non-verbal empathy of the most powerful form by their sensitive and intuitive manner. Gracia (2010, p. 87) concurs with this view, suggesting that “horses are able to project positive feelings, such as compassion and unconditional love, which in turn provide opportunities for corrective emotional experiences”.

It is important to remember that although horses inherently provide the conditions of worth for a therapeutic relationship to develop, this does not mean that in therapeutic endeavours such as EAP and EFT, the therapist is exempt from this. As in all psychotherapeutic encounters, equine-related therapies require well-trained therapists and therapists able to act ethically within their scope of practice.

This said, the horse more than stands her or his ground in terms of healing, as Chardonnens (2009, p. 327) emphasises:

“We note that a horse as co-therapist presents, by virtue of its characteristics and reactions, important similarities to the therapeutic conditions described as necessary and sufficient for the therapist to facilitate the change process. The horse is non-evaluative, a feature of the person-centered approach. The horse does not lay any categorising eye upon the symptoms of psychic, mental, or behavioural disorders.”

Kane (2004, p. 16) suggests that “when we encounter horses in the flesh, our minds and bodies consciously and unconsciously resonate with the stirrings of both psychological and physiological archetypal energies”. Kohanov (2007) concurs, suggesting that interaction with horses allows us to make contact with different equestrian archetypes, such as archetypes of experience, relationship, creativity, and transformation. When we work with horses, we are often drawn to a particular animal. It is often said at riding yards, “He prefers a steady ride,” or “She likes a challenge.” Yet we rarely question why this is so.

2.7. EQUINE ARCHETYPES

Bringing in personal experience, I have been drawn to a particular type of horse my entire life. In archetypal imagery, this horse represents a particular symbol, too. Since my first horse, whom I started riding at the age of eleven, all my horses have been challenges, to say the least. My first horse, Rainbow, lay the groundwork for all that was to follow. She was considered dangerous, and very nearly unrideable. Having been treated terribly by previous owners and riders, she had become tense, anxious, fiery and over-reactive to stimuli, such that a simple cue would cause a massive explosion (ending, often, with me on the ground). She was well beyond my skill, and well beyond my nerve, and yet our relationship blossomed. Over the four years that we lived and grew together, we were both transformed. In the end, we were separated by the only force that could do so: death.

However, Rainbow is the symbol of all the horses who have entered into my life since that day: traumatised horses, dangerous, fiery, better left alone than attempted, in a few words. I

believe that the archetypal energies activated between Rainbow and myself are also the energies which eventually drew me to this research topic, and to psychology and healing as a life choice. I believe also that the wound of her death, which traumatised me greatly, is the wound that is being turned into work here.

Kohanov (2007) feels that each equine archetype represents some relevant form of equine healing, allowing us access to different types and levels of healing. Her four basic equine archetypes are:

1. Archetypes of experience: what horses teach us about balance, timing, agility, power and emotional collection.
 2. Archetypes of relationship: what horses reveal about leadership, dominance, boundaries and community.
 3. Archetypes of creativity: how horses inspire authenticity, imagination, and innovation.
 4. Archetypes of transformation: what we become through embodying horse wisdom.
- (Kohanov, 2007, p. 10)

Kane (2004) feels that archetypal energies in horses correspond with major Jungian archetypes as developed in analytical psychology. These archetypes represent central roles, or types of person (or horse), as they exist across different cultures and times. In Jungian analytical psychology, these archetypes exist in the collective unconscious, a non-local space shared on an unconscious level by all human beings (Kane, 2004). Through dreams, myths, fairy tales, stories and synchronicities we experience, we come into contact with different archetypes of our person and our lives: anima and animus (female and male complements), dark shadow and bright shadow, trickster, hero, and willing sacrifice, to name some (Kane, 2004; Watkins, 2005).

Following Kohanov (2007), I suggest that this collective unconscious exists for horses also, with deep archetypal resonance for the species, where central roles and stories such as those experienced by myself, and postulated by Kane (2004) and Kohanov (2001; 2003; 2007) are present for Equus Callabus. In close relationships with horses, and in horses relating to us as humans, we are perhaps privileged to be allowed to tap into equine collective unconscious to some extent, such that we are able to experience the healing forces within for ourselves.

Garcia (2010, p. 86) suggests that work with horses allows us to learn about our relationship styles, or the way that we relate to others in our lives, as well as our approach to leadership, and a wide range of emotional and behavioural issues, which present themselves in dynamic pairs:

1. fear-courage
2. dominance-partnership
3. empowerment-disempowerment
4. clarity-ambiguity

Garcia (2010) shares four common themes found in her examination of the horse-human bond, each of which deserve to be examined in some detail. First, as mentioned before, horses are able to provide humans with immediate and accurate feedback regarding their inner mental or emotional states through mirroring. Second, there is a communicative level between humans and horses which functions on a non-verbal body-language level, as well as a more subtle intuitive level. Third, the human-horse bond can be “experienced as a spiritual, heart-based connection that evokes feelings of love” (Garcia, 2010, p. 87). Finally, equine communities seem to share similar ideas relating to feelings of connection to the Earth, matters of ecology, and socio-political activism relating to sustainability practices. In essence, these four themes “suggest that the horse-human relationship may facilitate a positive reframing of the individual's relationship to self, to others, and to the greater ecology of the Earth” (Garcia, 2010, p. 86).

2.8. RECENT RESEARCH

As suggested above, there are some indications that at the intersection between horses, therapy and adolescents lies a very powerful modality of change. Dell et al. (2008) are Canadian researchers who conducted a study of Equine-assisted learning in healing of First Nations Youth from solvent abuse. The programme was aimed at the development of mutual trust and respect between youth and horse, and learning the value of relationships. This establishment of a trusting relationship between youth and horse allowed the youth to learn that others are also safe to trust (Dell et al., 2008).

Schultz (2005) studied the effects of Equine-assisted psychotherapy on the psychosocial functioning of at-risk adolescents, aged between 12- and 18. The findings of this study suggested that at-risk adolescents who participated in a equine-related program experienced greater therapeutic progress in psychosocial functioning, than their peers who did not participate in a similar programme (Schultz, 2005).

Closer to home, a South African researcher, Bronkhorst (2006), conducted a qualitative study of the psychotherapeutic worth of horse whispering for the aggressive child. In this context, the term horse whispering may be equated with equine-assisted psychotherapy. The research conducted by Bronkhorst (2006) suggested that equine-related interventions may be regarded as a useful therapeutic technique when addressing aggression in children.

In closing, the above literature indicates that there lies something powerful behind the use of horses in therapy, and the very presence of horses in the lives of people. Furthermore, it seems that the horse-human bond may support adolescents as they experience the difficult transitional phase from child to young adult. Garcia (2010) draws our attention to the human-horse bond allowing us to experience life in a more fully embodied, rich way. Coates (2008, p. 19) illustrates this succinctly in her statement: “Horses can have an immeasurable restorative effect on human beings, as our interaction with them triggers an awakening of long-forgotten abilities as well as the emergence of attributes we didn't know existed within us.”

2.9. BRIDGES BETWEEN EXISTING THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES AND EQUINE HEALING

In discovering new modes of healing, I feel that it will be instructive to look at the conventional models of healing which may link well with equine healing. Sodekum Trotter (2012) suggests that we may find links between brief therapy, Gestalt therapy, reality therapy and Adlerian therapy and equine-assisted psychotherapy. Mann (2001) found that systems theory and equine-assisted psychotherapy share some common ground, and that it could be helpful in future for the two to evolve side by side. Chardonnens (2009) also drew links between Rogerian Client-Centered therapy and equine-assisted therapy. Additionally, I

would like to emphasise the value of Jungian Analytical Psychology and Narrative/Postmodern approaches in combination with equine healing. Each of these approaches will be discussed briefly, so as to anchor this exploration theoretically, before we move forward.

Systemic Theory

Systems theory and family therapy focus on individuals within context, contrasted with many other theories which focus on the individual only (Moore, 2002). Structurally, this already draws parallels between equine healing and systemic theory, moving away from seeing the individual in isolation, towards understanding humanity as part of a collective.

Mann (2001) feels that systemic theory is excellently suited to equine therapy, as it links with two basic concepts within systemic family therapy: first, the goal of decentralising the importance of the therapist within the family setting and second, reduced reliance on verbal communication and insight, with more focus on restructuring of patterns of interaction through experience and therapeutic directive.

Connecting family therapy with equine-assisted therapy, Mann (2001) cites an exercise called Appendages. In this exercise, three individuals must work together, all the time holding hands, to work with a horse. The person in the middle is considered the 'brain', and those to the left and the right are 'hands'. This exercise emphasises group work and communication, but also draws attention to coalitions and alliances which may exist within families.

These creative links between equine healing and the systemic approach seem particularly exciting for the future.

Brief Therapy

Both brief therapy, and equine-assisted psychotherapy focus on brief interventions, with a problem solving model for change. According to Sudekum Trotter (2012), the two basic philosophies that form the core of brief therapy are, first, the focus on visible behavioural interactions, and second, the use of purposefully designed interventions which leverage at a point where a visible pattern of behaviour may be changed.

Importantly, both approaches focus on experience first, with insight following. Equine-assisted psychotherapy, and indeed all equine encounters, are very powerfully embodied experiences, focussing on the here-and-now experience of the moment. Within this embodied experience, individual might discover certain things about themselves, or be challenged in certain ways. Yet, this insight is only gained after the moment has been presently experienced. This focus on experience over insight suggests that future approaches in equine-assisted healing may benefit greatly from integration of brief therapeutic approaches, but also that brief therapy may be immeasurably enhanced by the addition of the equine element.

Gestalt Therapy

The Gestalt approach focuses on the individual as an integrated, unique, organised whole being (Moore, 2002). Sudekum Trotter (2012) also draws our attention to the groundings of Gestalt therapy, which are that meaning is best derived and understood by considering an individual's understanding and interpretation of their experience in the moment. As with any interactions with horses, Gestalt therapy draws attention to the immediacy of experience, what is happening in the here-and-now. Also as with any horse interaction, Gestalt therapy is active and focused not on past events, but on present happenings.

Sudekum Trotter (2012) emphasises that “the client plays a very important role in the therapeutic process that leads to greater awareness of the reality of oneself and how one interacts with one's surroundings, including people, animals, and contact with one's natural environment. This awareness facilitates natural and spontaneous change” (p. 11).

Gestalt therapy and horses draw us into the present, and also encourage us to draw bridges and links between ourselves, others and the world.

Reality Therapy

Equine-assisted psychotherapy also draws from and has principles similar to reality therapy. Both approaches use directive techniques in their approaches, and in both approaches the therapist is an active participant in the unfolding therapy process. Similarly, both equine-

assisted therapy and reality therapy have a strong education-oriented focus (Sodekum Trotter, 2012).

As with the above-mentioned approaches, reality therapy also has a strong focus on experience over insight, and focuses on the doing part of behaviour. This interacts well with equine-assisted approaches which focus on the present moment, and using experience as a guide to insight and change.

Adlerian Therapy

Alfred Adler's therapy is also known as Individual Psychology, and makes use of a person-centred approach (Meyer & Viljoen, 2002). As with Gestalt therapy, the focus is on the whole person, and on unique integrated experiences.

Specifically, Adlerian therapy focuses on the central idea that we all move from feelings of inferiority, towards seeking some form of feeling of significance (Sodekum Trotter, 2012). This striving may be broken down into four different categories: physical, intellectual, psychological and social. Equine healing could be central to this striving on all levels, challenging on a physical level, requiring fast thinking and integration on an intellectual level, seeking ever-deepening self-knowledge, and connecting an individual not only with other horses, but also those around her or him.

Rogarian Client-Centered Therapy

The client-centred therapy of Carl Rogers has already been discussed in some detail in the preceding section. Here, I will only draw brief parallels between equine-healing and the client-centred approach. In this approach, there are three core conditions which are both necessary and sufficient for an effective therapeutic relationship to develop (Corey, 2005; Chardonens, 2009). These conditions of worth are: congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathy.

Horses display all three conditions in their own equine-centred way. As prey animals and incredibly sensitive herd animals, horses have developed finely tuned intuitions and modes of communication, which make them incredibly congruent, and also sensitive to incongruence

in others. Further, by their nature, animals exude a non-judgemental attitude, which is experienced by all those who interact with them as an unconditional positive regard. Finally, horses, through their sensitive natures and abilities to connect with the whole, they give a sense of true empathy, of 'being -there', something which is acutely felt in the feeling being-with or inhabitation as I discussed earlier.

The central tenets of person-centred therapy and equine healing, I believe, are hugely important in the relationship between adolescents and horses.

Jungian Analytical Psychology

Carl Jung's analytical psychology, in broad strokes, centres around our human drive towards integrating the many parts of our whole into a more harmonious being, the self (Viljoen, 2002).

This process is described as individuation or differentiation, and involves a “differentiation of subjectivity away from the fixed and narrow conceptions of personhood which are given by a collective culture” (Shulman Lorenz & Watkins, 2000, p. 7). It is central to Jung's understanding of individuation that we do not become isolated in our process, but that:

“Individuation is only possible with people, through people.” (Jung, 1988, p. 103) and
“Since the individual is not only a single entity, but also by his very existence, presupposes a collective relationship, the process of individuation does not lead to isolation, but to an intenser and more universal collective solidarity.” (Jung, 1966, p. 155)

Horses, as carriers of transcendence from isolation to an ecological embodied connectivity, seem to link very closely with Jung's understanding of individuation.

Narrative/Postmodern Approaches

Narrative approaches see human beings as language-generating, and meaning-making organisms (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992). As we live our lives, we construct stories about our experiences. Sometimes, our socially constructed realities become stuck, as Fruggeri

(1992, p. 43) describes “beliefs held by individuals construct realities and realities are maintained through social interaction which, in turn, confirm the beliefs that are then socially originated”.

When we interact with horses through stories which no longer serve us, this is experienced by horses as a form of incongruence. As discussed above, horses are incredibly sensitive to incongruence, and mirror this discomfort back to their human counterparts. This mirroring of incongruence may serve as an interruption to our no-longer-functional stories, and in turn perturb us to start re-storying our lives, singly and together, in ways more suitable to our new circumstances.

From a broader perspective, as horses perturb us to become more aware of the ecology of Earth, we may too be discomforted into re-storying our relationship to soul, nature and spirit, as well as the destructive narratives we currently use to engage with the world around us.

2.10. FINDING GRACE IN OPENING

Garcia (2010, p. 86) addresses the nature of the bond between humans and horses in a manner that touches upon the poetics of life, suggesting that “the horse-human relationship, when enacted as aesthetic engagement, as a form of creative expression, as metaphor, as art, may open the door of what [Gregory] Bateson called the possibility of finding *grace*”. It is this opening of the door that lies at the heart of this research project.

This project of equine healing through human horse relationships, this opening, will require a different kind of being. Watkins (2005, p. 7) indicates that this inhabitation, this sensual intellect, can be achieved through the process of “dwelling with”. In dwelling closely with horses, and being willing to heal and be healed, this careful noticing may open pathways previously untraveled. It is my hope that through this exploration of equine healing, we may briefly touch upon the feeling of dwelling with:

“Like a lover's careful noticing of the beloved, such attention finds ways of caring action that are not superimposed, but arise from the ground of relationship spawned by careful attention.” (Watkins, 2005, p. 7)

In exploring the bond between adolescents and horses, I will also be dwelling with them, as I have inhabited my own unique experiences with horses. It is my hope that this careful attention to the soul of the world, this opening to the other, that the self/other dichotomy may be transcended, and that we may see pathways of equine healing not seen before.

2.11. A BRIEF BACKWARD GLANCE

“The backward glance is an invitation to linger in the moment in order to recollect what we have lost, left behind, or forgotten. [...] The backward glance presumes a pause, an arrest of one's forward motion in the world, even if only for the briefest moments.” (Romanyshyn, 2001, p. 143)

In closing this chapter, I would like to take that brief backward glance that Romanyshyn (2001) calls attention to. A breath perhaps, a pause... In this section, we have moved between individual and ecology, between reason and dream, between rational and emotional. We played witness to some of the elements of equine healing encountered by those who have gone before, we have speculated on some that may yet be seen through the opening of new pathways. Horse lies central to this backward glance, and finally the moving forward also. Again fulfilling her transcendent function, horse may allow us to travel in the spaces between, and provide us the courage to move forward.

“Are you listening, dear?
Don't give a girl a pony, dear.
A pony's not a lightsome thing.
She'll grow up strong, she won't beware,
She'll make her own decisions – oh!
Dear, you aren't listening.”
(Haas, 2004, p. 151)

Like Haas' girl with a pony, I have grown some courage over the pages and months that have passed. Equine healing holds a note of subversion to it, being not strictly clinical, being not exactly academic or reasonable. Yet, equine healing takes place, beyond the narrow scope of what some feel should be called psychology or even healing. Equine healing takes place, and, I believe, will still inform much future equine-assisted psychotherapy practice. But, for the moment, as Romanyshyn (1999) cautions, I have called up a voice that must finally too pass, I have witnessed a moment, you have witnessed it with me, but even that, as water slips away through the palm of a hand, will slip away.

For the moment, that's enough.

“So I drifted,
A stranger in a strange land,
Caught between two worlds
Without a handhold in either.”

(Millman, 2000, p. 61)

2.12. ADOLESCENCE

INTRODUCTION

Maynard Nicol (2001) calls it a slushy time, Piper (1994) similarly charges adolescence with being a mushy time. Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) acknowledge that to deal with adolescence is a slippery slope, an experience that creates exclusions even as it tries to be inclusive. Sax (2010) equates adolescence to a dark night of the soul, a deep crisis of identity and belonging.

If adolescence is in its nature, in a word, slushy, one would expect to see theories about adolescence mirroring this experience. However, this is not the case. In my search for literature describing adolescence, I found work describing the phase as being homogenous, one grand experience for adolescents everywhere. These works, although helpful in establishing normative goals for adolescent development, did not describe the *feeling* of teenage turbulence, or the *magic* of this most mushy of stages in life.

Freud (1961) understood progression into adolescence as an awakening of sexual urges and wishes, which had been latent prior to puberty. Erikson (1963) also described life changes as going through a set series of stages, with adolescence being primarily understood in terms of identity formation, and role confusion. Although these frames are helpful, they will not be my primary mode through which adolescence will be viewed.

Victor Turner (1969) in *The Ritual Process* describes a process of change which includes three stages: separation, liminality, and reincorporation. Although his work was based on anthropological studies of traditional cultures in Africa, his liminal processes have been adopted widely in other fields, as process descriptors (see Cook-Sather, 2006; Fanetti, 2005; Jones, Cohn & Shapiro, 2012). I will briefly outline this process, and how it may be applicable to the context of adolescent development.

In addition, in keeping with the holistic view of this work, and a need to search for the transformative elements of adolescence, the work of Brenthro, Brokenleg and van Bockern (2005) and Gilgun (2002) with the Native American Medicine Wheel will be incorporated into this discussion on adolescence. It is my hope that by seeking more holistic and positive

re-understandings of adolescence, this immensely powerful and turbulent stage of life can be reframed from the ‘terrible teens’, to a transformative and magical process of becoming.

2.13. LIMINALITY - BETWIXT AND BETWEEN

Arnold van Gennep (1960) described liminality as part of the *rites de passage*, the rites that accompany any transition from one state to another. This transition was mapped in terms of three stages: separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation (or re-incorporation). In any change or transitional period of an individual, these three stages seem to apply, to a lesser or greater degree. Markstrom and Iborra (2003, p. 402) define rites of passage as “ceremonies that correspond and bring dramatisation to major life events, such as birth, coming-of-age, initiations, marriage and death, and they consist of a series of rituals that convey individuals from one social status or role to another”.

Van Gennep (1960) understood the first phase, separation, as a phase characterised by symbolic detachment of an individual from a fixed point in the social structure to which they firmly belonged before. In terms of adolescence, this symbolic detachment accompanies the transition from childhood to adolescence. This is not a clean and easy break, and often takes place over years. This process would be marked by removing the symbols that identify one as ‘child’ in society. These may be the dolls and toys that were always strewn about a room, now packed into a box, replaced by symbolic identifiers of adolescence. This change may be signalled through behaviour, too, questioning and resisting rules and structures which had always functioned well, but could not be accepted into adolescence. Often, this separation falls over the movement from primary school to high school, which signals a large structural separation process, too. Friends change, schools change, subjects change, routines change, teachers change, *everything* changes, becomes separated from what is known before.

Once separated, the adolescents stand upon the threshold of the new, in a space that is “necessarily ambiguous” (Turner, 1969, p. 95). They are the *liminal personae*, threshold people, standing in a space of vast potential but also vast tension, betwixt and between.

“Liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon.”
(Turner, 1969, p. 95)

The adolescents, as *liminal personae*, often elude or slip through the cracks of definitions which normally situate persons within the cultural space. Although in our society there are certain rules and identifiers that accompany adolescents in their journey, these themselves are mushy and slushy. They are hard to pin down, and are often ambiguous, as ambiguous as the line between childhood and adulthood.

In this state of liminality, neophytes often develop intense relationships. Turner describes these relationships as *communitas*, a community of equal individuals who must together submit to the general authority of elders. Adolescents form intense and often lasting links during this turbulent phase of change, a moment simultaneously in and out of time, where the most powerful stability is the links to others who are in the same position as themselves (Turner, 1969). Part of the *communitas*, I believe, are the intense relationships developed with horses during this time in their lives. Horses, as we have seen, are beings who are continually on the *limen*, but who possess the ability to also transcend dialectics with ease. Horses, in effect, can enter into the threshold spaces with ease, hold the tensions, but also help to transcend the tensions, and transform gracefully. In this study, the space of the threshold, the *limen*, and the *liminal personae* carry highest importance.

Cook-Sather (2006) emphasises that this phase also offers a respite from normality, during which neophytes are offered an opportunity to “contemplate for a while the mysteries that confront all men” (Turner, 1974, p. 242). This contemplation characterises one of the most poignant movements of adolescence: the questioning of authority and received wisdom. From this contemplation, some old structures may be accepted, but many new structures and ideas, much new mystery and magic may be accepted into the adolescent’s new world. These liminal energies may allow for the entrance of new narratives, new stories and new ideas to enter into the adolescent’s world.

Finally, the neophyte passes through the threshold to the third phase, reaggregation or reincorporation. In this phase, the rite of passage is consummated. The threshold person moves from instability to a stable state once more, and in accordance with this, enters into a state where new rights and obligations are bestowed onto her. This reaggregation would signal the movement into adulthood. Again, this is not a simple cut-and-dried process, but

often takes years. Adolescence and early adulthood have become a space of ambiguity, where often the symbols of adolescence linger, and early adulthood resists full incorporation.

The phases of separation, *limen* and reaggregation are by no means intended to provide a complete ‘fit’ with the movement of adolescence. In fact, to search for ideal fit would be contrary to the research ethos of this project. There are some elements of the phases that fit, there are some that do not. However, what these phases do provide are helpful process descriptors which help to map some aspects of adolescence. As Bateson (1972) cautioned in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, the task is to not mistake the map for the territory. The same may be said for the following section, in which I incorporate the Native American Medicine Wheel philosophy of development into adolescent tasks.

2.14. THE MEDICINE WHEEL

“I had a sense of belonging as I grew up because of my people’s relationship with [the] elements, and I imagine that’s why most of our people relate to the environment so easily. We recognised a long time ago that there was life all around us – in the water, in the ground, in the vegetation. Children were introduced to the elements so that as we grew up, we were not looking down upon nature or looking up to nature. We felt a part of nature, on the same level. We respected each blade of grass, one leaf on a tree among many other leaves, everything.” (Bear Heart & Larkin, 1996, p. 1)

The words of Bear Heart capture the essential meaning of the Native American Medicine Wheel. Medicine Wheels were used in North America prior to the arrival of Europeans in the Americas, and continue to be used today, in both traditional and adapted forms (Gilgun, 2002). Medicine Wheels are divided into four quadrants that represent north, south, east and west, and are traditionally made of stones of many sizes. These wheels are made in places where Native people come together for the purposes of celebration, reflection, teaching, decision-making, healing and restoration (Gilgun, 2002). Different wheels are built for different reasons, and stones each represent different elements of the wheel.

According to Reid and Ross (2005), the quadrants of the wheel are necessary for wholeness, but together they also function to form a perfect circle. Therefore, the elements of the medicine wheel function together to make a circle, and one cannot be taken from the other. These Medicine Wheels remind of the Mandala work done by Carl Jung, who understood circles and Mandalas to signify the incorporation of the self and the whole ecology into one functioning whole, as well as denoting phases of integration in the life-long journey of individuation (Dunne, 2000; Tenzin-Dolma, 2006).

Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern (2005) developed a Medicine Wheel, with the Lakota artist George Blue Bird, to represent the journey of children and adolescents in the Wheel of Courage. This Circle of Courage represents native traditional child-rearing wisdom, but is also in line with a positive view of youth development, and has been adapted by the authors for wider use in different cultural groups (Brendtro et al., 2005). The Circle of Courage represents four central quadrants: belonging, mastery, independence and generosity, which Brendtro et al. (2005, p. 131) consider to be “universal growth needs”, as represented in the figure below.

Belonging refers to the universal need to experience love and support, through positive relationships in relation to family, friends and community. Within the Native American view, these positive links are not only matters of biology, but also connects to others within the community, belonging both to family and to larger groups in the ecology (Gilgun, 2002).

Mastery is understood by Brendtro et al. (2005) as the ability to do things well and feel pride in being able to do so. Young people in Native American Culture are encouraged to develop mastery in cognitive, emotional, physical and spiritual domains. Mastery is focussed on individual competence and strengths, not in competition between individuals.

To function well in the Independent quadrant means to have the freedom to make choices, to have control over your own life, to be able to affect others, but also to be considerate in the effects of your words and behaviours on others (Gilgun, 2002). Independence is taught gradually, and increases in the continuing journey towards adulthood. Personal independence is continually balanced by social structures and expectations.

Generosity is understood to be the ability to give in many forms, including time, care, recognition, goods and services. Generosity requires the balancing of personal interests with those of others in the community (Hurwitz, 2013). This in turn leads to increased feelings of

self-worth and self-esteem, and caring for others is considered to be an essential resource for coping with one's own life stresses and worries. Generosity allows the individual to break free from a preoccupation with self (Hurwitz, 2013).



Figure 1. George Bluebird's depiction of the Circle of Courage Medicine Wheel.

According to these authors, the young people of today live lives often characterised not by completion and a holistic understanding of their world, but rather, many broken circles (Brendtro et al., 2005, p. 131).

1. Instead of Belonging, there are families that are fractured by death and divorce, unfriendly and unnurturing schools, rejecting peers, and a sense of cultural alienation. These young people are often alienated from positive adults and peers, and are adrift.

2. Instead of Mastery, children are forced into increasing competition. This takes place primarily at school, where both academic and extra-curricular pressures require performance and achievement, and a sense of never being good enough. Children who fall outside the performance norm are losers and outsiders. These children generally fail to develop their inherent potential.

3. Instead of Independence, young people are forced to become more dependent, often granted freedom in some aspects of life, but not given the responsibility to learn to use their independence fully.

4. Instead of Generosity, young people are reared in a world where money equals worth. This fosters a pre-occupation with having, and defining self, to the detriment of the ability to show care for others.

If these four quadrants are balanced, they create an environment where the circle is complete, and young people can individuate safely and authentically. If the circle is broken, quadrants are out of balance.

“Not only are these four qualities necessary for wholeness, but together they also form a balance, a perfect circle. Thus Independence, which relies in part on Mastery, is inseparable from and must balance with Belonging; the independent individual functions well in his role in the society to which he belongs, not apart from that society and its concerns.” (Reid & Ross, 2005, p. 166)

These notions of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity are in many ways similar to concepts in Western psychosocial models of adolescent developments, such as those of Erikson (1963; 1968), who emphasised concepts such as competence, autonomy and generativity in various stages of life development. However, the Circle of Courage departs from these notions in some aspects. Firstly, the Circle of Courage implies at the most basic level balance and integration, lest the circle be “broken”. Therefore, if there is difficulty in one quadrant, there will likely be difficulties in other quadrants. In Western psychological approaches, difference competencies are often viewed as separate.

Secondly, the Circle of Courage presumes an inherently holistic and ecological mind-set, where the whole is worth more than the sum of its parts, and where individual, family, culture and ecosystem are all hierarchically the same, and are intimately connected. White Bison (2002, p. 17) captures this interconnection:

“When we sit in a circle, we are sitting in the exact design of the universe. The atom is in a circle, and Mother earth is in a circle. The moon circles around the earth and the earth circles around the sun. Therefore, when we sit in a circle all the natural laws are designed to support everything that is taking place in a circle. When we recover we form circles of recovery. We heal in a circle and we talk in a circle. We experience the power of the circle.”

According to Miller (2008, p. 27), the Medicine Wheel is “a pan-Indian symbol and can be understood in many different ways from tribe to tribe, but what is universal about it is that it

represents change, balance, and harmony with the natural order of life”. These words introduce the third difference between Western psychological views and the Medicine Wheel, which is that the Circle of Courage is not normative. Although four vital quadrants are emphasised, these quadrants are not exclusive of other tasks and processes which young people face in their journey from childhood to adulthood. Instead, the quadrants represent four meta-categories which may contain any number of sub-themes within them.

As I’ve already stated, I did not and do not expect to find ‘fit’ between the phases of Liminality, or the Native American Wheel and the concept of the all-encompassing circle. Instead, these two concepts give rise to a different way of thinking about adolescence, moving to a more positive model, one that is transitional, optimistic, non-normative, ecological and spiritual. It is my hope that by framing the journeys of adolescents in these two descriptions, that they may recommend a different way of approaching the research exploration and data that follows.

“This is not a place
As much as it is a point of perspective.”

(Bach, 1988, p. 45)

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

3.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE [NOT]METHOD SECTION

“Among these hundred bones and nine orifices there is something. For now let's call it 'gauze in the wind'. Surely we can say it's thin, torn easily by a breeze. It grew fond of mad poetry long ago and eventually this became its life work. At times, it has wearied of the venture and thought of quitting; at times it has pressed forward, boasting of its victories. Battling thus back and forth, it has never been at rest. For a while it yearned for worldly success, but poetry thwarted that; for a while it thought of enlightening its foolishness, but poetry broke that off. Finally, without talent or skill, it simply follows along this one line.” (Basho, 2005, p. 29)

This section on method scares me. One part of me is pulled towards the words of Beer (2005) and Mathews (2007), who call for an end to the hegemony of method in social sciences, who insist that if research is to be alive, we must move from the honouring of method above those who actively participate in our journeys of discovery. Another part of me is aware of the fact that I am inexperienced in this field, and that this piece of work will ultimately be subject to voices beyond my own, voices which may not agree with this poetic turn of reflecting, who may expect simple and logical headings such as: theoretical framework, sampling method, data collection, and so on.

Yet as I reflect back on the words I just wrote, I also draw courage. I see in those words the very pull that has tugged me towards this research, the setting up of opposites, of binaries, and my deep wish to transcend this 'me' and 'other' space. This discomfort sits just right, it's a rumbling deep inside that tells me that I may have stepped in further down the stream, but I am still in the same stream.

Beer (2005, p. 45) mirrors my feelings, and suggests a way of (non)escape: “To attempt to escape is only to set up binaries...method and not method; self and not-self; power and marginalisation.” Therefore, in attempting to escape, I am only further inhabiting the space I wish to avoid, the either/or space. In wishing so vehemently to move beyond this enframing

by method, I circularly enframe myself further (Beer, 2005). Of course, once aware of this bind of opposites and dichotomies, I may in some way attempt to transcend this. It is again on the wings of white horses that I move to the borderlands...

3.2. STARTING ON THE OUTSIDE, WORKING MY WAY IN

STARTING ON THE INSIDE, WORKING MY WAY OUT

Discovering that the centre was indeed the periphery, and that the periphery represented only another centre.

Discovering that my own construction of binaries is perhaps inevitable, if I wish to work with feelings of in-betweenity, transcendence, the liminal.

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow

Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow

(Eliot, 1925, p. 85)

T.S. Eliot, in his 1925 poem *The Hollow Men*, sensed this similar charge between polarities, and the accompanying feeling of unease that went with it. He knew-felt this through the metaphor of the Shadow. I find it comforting that he, too, felt the Shadow peeking over his shoulder during his work. I feel this Shadow hanging over my attempt at writing an honest chapter on theoretical framework and method. I feel this Shadow trying to hijack my words

of authenticity, and turn them into words of certainty. I feel the Shadow plucking even at the wings on my white horse, but I am relieved to see that the white horse is stronger, and that in attending to the language of the soul, I may move beyond this sticky/stuck feeling-sense.

3.3. ONTOLOGICAL MUSINGS (STARTING FROM AS FAR OUTSIDE AS I DARE)

I argue after Beer (2005, p. 42) that “I am confronted constantly with the ontological and epistemological hegemonies that riddle education from the ground up”. During my preparation for this research, and specifically for this chapter, I was confronted with methodological madness, as I have decided to coin the phrase. I am certain that much of the madness and chaos that I felt was due to my own lack of experience in the field of research. But as I learned more, asked more, read more, thought more, I found that this chaos was not only my own, but also that of a field in flux. Scheurich (1997) called this methodological madness the mere shuffling around of paradigmatic furniture, and argued that this furniture primarily belongs to those in power. These are the same powerful voices that plague me, the voices that tell me that research should be objective, that it must follow clear circumscribed steps, that data must be collected and presented in a way that tells the world of a new discovered truth.

However, regardless of how much we re-arrange the furniture, the room remains ultimately the same room (even if we paint the walls and get new curtains). I found this in my trawls through the annals of qualitative research, from autoethnography, to narrative inquiry, to phenomenology, to heuristic inquiry, to grounded theory, to social constructionism, to critical theory. I do not wish to take away from the valuable contributions each of these approaches have made to qualitative research, and the steps these approaches have taken to move us forward in the field of social research. But I do wish to reflect the confusion I felt when I finally realised my difficulty with the huge amounts of furniture being thrown around the room.

In fact, I gave up and decided to leave the room entirely.

Outside the room, I found an entire world going on beyond the paradigmatic furniture re-arranging. And this move made me ask a number of questions of myself: How do I intend to suggest a method for this research, if I have not stepped outside the room and asked myself about what I believe reality to be? If I intend to move beyond the Cartesian dualisms, what unified ontology might possibly inform this movement? If I want to honour both my own voice, those of the teenagers participating in this journey, and the voices of those horses who have graced us with their presence and carriage, do I not owe it to myself, to them, to go deeper into these questions, to go further?

3.4. TOWARDS A/N [N]ONTOLOGY

The ambiguous nature of the preceding heading is fully intentional. I am aware that we cannot function without some inherent belief about the nature of reality. This ontology is influenced by our entire life-world, our being-in-the-world. Circularly, our being-in-the-world also informs our ontology. Beer (2005) suggests that we not only enact our ontology, we are also enacted by our ontology. Following this, we not only enact research, but we are enacted by research. There is no way of escaping our ontology, but there is a way of managing it. I believe this is by being aware of what we believe about the world around us, and to state this belief clearly in an enterprise such as the one I am attempting.

Romanyshyn (2008) reminds us of the consequences of forgetting that we see the world through a lens. Because our ontology is so natural to us, we forget that we see the world through a lens that is first and foremost uniquely our own, as well as being embedded in the culture and world we live in. When we forget that we see through a particular lens, become blind to the fact that what we experience of the world is not 'real' as such, it is a product of the eye and the mind and the heart that perceives it. We see the world and we feel the world beyond ourselves through these mirrors and lenses, and forget that these lenses are not lenses of anything but belief - thus, the importance of belief, and the importance of discussing this belief here.

As I have stated before, I have no desire to discover any form of objective reality. Even more, it is my belief that there is no such thing as an objective reality. My ontology is one of

belief, and my life-world is fully constructed through my lenses of perception. If I accept this, I also accept that this is what I believe for others. Therefore, I also believe that each participant in this journey has their own life-world built upon belief. It follows, for me at least, that we cannot privilege one ontology, or way of feeling and seeing the world, above another. I cannot be said to be the expert in anything but by own life, inasmuch as each teenage participant and horse in this study are the experts in their own lives.

We live, as we believe.

Magically, and excitingly, it does not end there.

“Thus never a completeness of the One, but constitution of two worlds open and in relation with one another, and which give birth to a third world as work in common and space-time to be shared.” (Irigaray, 2002, p. 10)

Luce Irigaray speaks of this not ending in *The Way of Love* (2002), which she calls a third world, and which I have taken to calling the third space. Beyond my belief-world, and the belief-world of those around me, are connections and communications which take place every day. In the bringing together of myself and another, we are no longer 'I' and 'you', but we have created a third space between us, another, co-experienced reality.

“There does not exist a world proper to all subjects: one truth alone, one beauty alone, one science alone.” (Irigaray, 2002, p. 8)

Not one magic alone, one interaction alone, but a multitude of interactions. All equally valid and all equally descriptive - these worlds are descriptions of our lives and the lives that we share.

Beer (2005) describes this coming together into the third space as “being-in-the-space-between-us” (p. 50). There is me, Stephanie, one participant in this journey. There are also the teenagers, who are further participants. Beyond them, there are the horses. In each interaction between us, we create a sacred space of authentic engagement, where we not only honour the realities of the other, but also honour a third reality, which we make together. I wish to expand this notion beyond the notions of intersubjectivity, or of social constructionism.

In this third world between us, we create a field that is nondualistic. We collapse the subject-object field, realising that this notion of separation is only appearance.

“The subject – that collapses, that chooses, that observes (or measures), that experiences – dependently co-arises with awareness of the objects that are observed and experienced; they dependently co-arise” (Goswami, n.d., p. 5).

Irigaray (2002) argues that, in this field of being-together, one or the other cannot be integrated or disappeared, because one and the other are still two. But from this interaction between the two, a third may arise. And in this third space, we are no longer talking about, or talking at, we are speaking with, we are experiencing with, we are alive with.

I reflect back on a journal entry I made during the reading which led me to this chapter:

“Something tells me that this thing I've always glimpsed from the corner of the eye in passing, I've found some way to touch it. It has to do with the tension I've always felt with polarities, with extremes and alternations, with change. Somewhere in here is a way of seeing the universe beyond postmodernism, and yet I feel that this way is epistemologically and paradigmatically impossible from where I stand now. It is so incredibly raw and embodied there are no words. But I can feel it.”

This 'thing' that I cannot explain in language or 'thingify' is the third space which arises, but it is also so raw and magical and sacred that it touches on the feelings I explored in the previous chapter, these feelings of indwelling that have no words but that can only be felt.

Recent ontological interpretations of quantum theory have given rise to similar descriptions of the third space, such as the zero-point field (McTaggart, 2001), and the implicate order (Bohm & Hiley, 1993). McTaggart (2001, p. 1) describes this zero-point field:

“Human beings and all living things are a coalescence of energy in a field of energy connected to every other thing in the world.”

Bohm and Hiley (1993) describe this field as the implicate order, and that the universe, at a quantum level, has the quality of unbroken wholeness (p. 352).

“Extending this view, we see that each human being similarly participates in an inseparable way in society and in the planet as whole.” (p. 386)

This belief about the world around me places certain requirements in continuing with a theoretical framework and all the practical aspects that follow. As I have shown throughout, it requires that I view myself, my teenage participants, and the horses that form part of the study as equal. We all have equal stories, and all bring our being-ness to the third space which arises between us. This places a heavy onus on whatever conceptual framework and method that we use as language to allow for an interplay between ourselves, and the eventual representation of this journey as an academic text. It requires not only a way of the mind, but a way of the heart, and a language of the soul. An interruption of this kind may be in order:

“I was
our Lady of the Foals,
Great Mare, Great Queen, Great Mother,
Rhiannon, and Macha
were some of my names.
...
Forgotten for some centuries,
I did not cease to be,
and like all patient things,
I rise.
...
All is not well yet.
I would not suggest it.
...
The stables swing back
toward shrine.
My acolytes study ancient arts.
I am encouraged.” (Haas, 2004, p. 148-150)

3.5. HOW DO I GO FORWARD?

Mathews (2006) cautions me that “how we understand the world determines, to a large degree, how we treat it” (p. 85). I have examined the way I understand the world in detail above, and I agree that I must find some theoretical and methodological way to move forward. The way forward must honour my own subjective statement of belief, and in so doing, honour my own voice, and the voices of those who participate in this process with me. Even those who, anthropocentrically speaking, do not have voices. Language, as a mode of communicating the incommunicable, confounds me.

How then to work with the circle of subjectivity (Romanyshyn, 2010), with the third world (Irigaray, 2002) that I have envisioned? The answer is suggested to me by Mathews (2006, p. 101), through what she calls synergy and engagement:

“Synergy is here defined as a form of relationship between two or more parties who engage with each other in such a way that something new and larger than either of them, but true to the inner principle of each, is born.”

“Synergy then is a modality not so much of letting be as of *engagement*.” (original italics)

In my searches for a new way forward, I encountered a number of approaches which, although not complete (acknowledging that nothing is ever fully complete), allow, with sensitive and conscientious use, for a language and synergistic engagement. First, I consider at the heuristic research of Clark Moustakas (1990) and Clark Moustakas and Bruce Douglass (1985). Second, I will examine hermeneutic phenomenology as understood from Martin Heidegger's approach to being-in-the-world (1953). Finally, I will consider the work done by Robert Romanyshyn, and his concepts of The Wounded Researcher and Complex Knowing (2010; 1991).

“Two signatories join to create a new signature which is larger and calligraphically richer than either of the original signatures yet feels true to the essence of each of the signatories.” (Mathews, 2006, p. 103).

3.6. HEURISTIC APPROACH

“I don't know how I'm going to do this,
because I've never done research before.”

These words were spoken to Etherington (2004), by a research participant who was a first time researcher herself. They resonate with me powerfully. The same participant elaborates, this time on the feeling of being in a heuristic process of discovery:

“I go all over the place
I go along different roads
that I've never been before.
It's like you sleep, eat and breathe it
... that's what it is for me.” (Etherington, 2004, p. 51)

These words might as well be my own. They make sense for me on a very basic level. They also serve to ground me. On one hand, I am in the position of researcher. On the other, as with the participant above, I am also someone who is confused and who is learning, who gets lost, and who gets totally swept away by my project at times. Sometimes I get lost along the roads I walk, sometimes I lose the road entirely, sometimes, by accident, I find something embodied, something authentic, something I can connect to as a human being.

Moustakas and Douglass (1985) explain that heuristics is, at its most basic level, an approach to problem solving that involves an effort to know the essence of some aspect of life through the internal pathways of the self. I was drawn to this approach because I felt that I could not exclude my own subjectivities from the research, thereby claiming objectivity. I felt that, as I had been drawn to this research topic, and this topic to me, I could not exclude this draw from the actual journey. Inasmuch as I was drawn to the horses and the children, through many sets of synchronous events, they were also drawn to me. As much as I have impacted on them, they have also impacted on me as a person, changing me irrevocably.

Heuristics offers me a pathway for this, as it “requires a subjective process of reflecting, exploring, sifting, and elucidating the nature of the phenomenon under investigation” (Moustakas & Douglass, 1985, p. 40). Parallel to, and indeed embedded in this research

journey, are a number of other processes in my life. The one, the training to become a psychotherapist, and the self-reflective process that requires the development of the self, before one can authentically engage with others. Another, the presence in my life of certain mentors and guides who have provided me with a space, sometimes safe, sometimes provocative, sometimes frightening, always challenging, where I may learn about my own processes of the self, and learn the paths that I may travel in my own process of individuation; as a woman, as a young adult, as a young researcher, as a psychotherapist. Throughout this text thus far, these paths and reflections have been integrated, woven into the tapestry of this endeavour.

Moustakas and Douglass (1985, p. 40) suggest that this data of self-reflection is not merely personal or subjective feedback, but that “when pursued through intimate and authentic processes of the self, the 'data' that emerge are autobiographical, original, and accurately descriptive of the textures and structures of lived experience”. As such, heuristics also does not prescribe a particular methodology to use. I found my way to heuristics, in a manner of speaking, via my informal methodology. As this process unfolded, as I learned more about myself and those around me, like a magpie, I drew all scraps of glimmers of something bright to me: journal entries, scribbles on papers, meaningful e-mails and text messages, dreams, synchronicities and strange occurrences, symbols which appeared in my life and seemed imminently meaningful. By bright I do not mean to imply good; instead, I mean to imply those events that shook me, that challenged me, and that pushed me to evolve continuously. These have been interwoven in the work so far, and I will continue to do so as this work meanders forth.

“Heuristics is concerned with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity; with experience, not behaviour. Formal hypotheses play no part, though the researcher may have initial beliefs or convictions regarding the theme or question, based on intuition and on prior knowledge and experience.” (Moustakas & Douglas, 1985, p. 42)

Anderson (2011) likens heuristic research to intuitive inquiry within transpersonal research. She relates early notes from her own field experience in her development as a researcher: “rigour without dogma, breaking set in concept making, compassion as value and principle, state-specific access to experience, contemplative conversations and engaging the psyche in

research” (p. 17). According to Anderson (2011), heuristic approaches to research allow for iterative cycles of interpretation, and these allow for softer edges within the research process, granting freedom of expression, but also insisting upon intellectual thoroughness throughout.

“In honouring the archetypal, symbolic, imaginal, and possible latent in all human experience, the analyses and interpretations provided by intuitive inquiry tend toward wholeness and wellness, regardless of the topic chosen.” (Anderson, 2011, p. 17)

Integral to intuitive inquiry and the heuristic approach is the idea of tacit knowing.

Moustakas and Douglass (1985) describe the process of inquiry as essentially inner knowing. This concept of inner knowing owes its development to the work of Michael Polanyi, who wrote of tacit knowing in his 1966 publication, *The Tacit Dimension*. Polanyi (1966, p. 4) stresses that “we can know more than we can tell”. The central role of tacit knowing in heuristic inquiry is that inner knowing is stressed:

“The tacit dimension is the forerunner of inference and intuition, guiding the person to untapped aspects of awareness and nonlinear ways that elude analysis and explanation... Tacit knowing operates behind the scenes, giving birth to hunches and vague, formless insights that characterise heuristic discovery.” (Moustakas & Douglass, 1985, p. 49).

Polanyi (1966) suggests that all knowledge is first and foremost personally, internally discovered, and known tacitly. This understanding of tacit knowledge may only be attained through the process of indwelling:

“Indwelling refers to the heuristic process of turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of the nature or meaning of a quality or theme of human experience... The indwelling process is conscious and deliberate, yet it is not lineal or logical. It follows clues wherever they appear; one dwells inside them and expands their meanings and associations until a fundamental insight is achieved.” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 24)

Polanyi (1966) says that we can never know a phenomenon only by looking *at* it, but only by dwelling in it. Hiles (2002, p. 7-8) suggests that heuristic indwelling may be practised

through certain basic phases, which are not exhaustive but merely suggestive of an approach:

1. Choosing a text or cultural/spiritual practice with which to engage, and in doing so, having no expectation of what will emerge, only that something will.
2. Engaging with that text or practice on a deep level, and exploring the demands this engagement makes on you as the researcher.
3. Indwelling over a long period of participation, deeply remaining part of the process, but also following leads and hunches as they guide you.
4. Sifting through and gathering together of materials and experiences, allowing tacit knowing to emerge.
5. Reflection on the authenticity of these inner knowings, including working through certain phases again as you feel necessary.
6. Formulating a creative synthesis of the inquiry that reflects both participation and authenticity.
7. Establishing validity through the sharing of this synthesis with others.

In terms of my own research journey, my indwelling follows a somewhat different path, but I am pleasantly surprised by the parallels between these suggestions, and my own process. Since childhood, I have been involved in the world of horses. During my teenage years, my embodied experiences with horses became my salvation, my safe space, my place of being only myself. From these years onwards, I engaged deeply, and dwelled with horses and myself, and later, the teenagers that I trained, their horses, and my own continued experience. This experience of extended deep indwelling drew me to my current topic of research. As more and more tacit experiences and inner knowings began to emerge, I realised that this topic and I were circularly interconnected and interwoven in the fabric of the other. It is at this point that my research became alive, and I feel that I am able to proceed with further steps in the discovery.

Hiles' (2002) phases of heuristic indwelling are similar to the six phases of heuristic inquiry outlined by Moustakas (1990):

1. Initial engagement: During this phase, the researcher is called to a topic with intense interest, holding both important social meanings and personal meaning. This initial engagement calls for self-dialogue, and a start of the inner process of knowing

and meanings. During this phase, the topic is not fully clarified, it is only partially formed. As the process evolves, the topic unfolds further and further.

2. Immersion: During this phase, everything in the researcher's life "becomes crystallized around this question" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). Immersion happens naturally and not through particular planning, once the researcher has surrendered fully to phase one.

3. Incubation: The researcher retreats from intense, deep focus on the topic. During this phase, the tacit dimension is allowed to "wrestle with the new input gained during immersion, reorganising and re-forming wholes and clusters of wholes, creating new meaning, new behaviours, and new feelings." (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 67). It is important to surrender to the process of incubation, and not to try and push for knowing. Inner knowing can only emerge through relaxing and allowing the intuition to do its work, not through mental operations or grasping with directed effort at an outcome.

4. Illumination: Illumination follows incubation naturally, once the researcher has calmed down and allowed tacit knowing to emerge instinctively. "Illumination is that moment when there is a breakthrough into conscious awareness of wholes or clustered wholes that form into themes inherent in the question" (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 67).

5. Explication: During explication, the researcher consciously examines what has awoken from the tacit dimension, to examine the layers of meaning that have emerged from intuitive leaps and breakthroughs. Focussing, indwelling, self-searching, and self-disclosure remain part of the process, as further knowings emerge.

6. Creative synthesis: "This synthesis embodies an inclusive expression of the essences of what has been investigated" (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 69). At this point, the story of the research process can be told in such a way that it reveals a new whole that has been found and experienced due to all the phases having been surrendered to, and due to a union between internal and external knowings.

West (2001) emphasises that these steps, although they naturally seem to flow from one another, are in no way linear, or constitute a rigid framework which must be followed.

Indeed, it seems that if we fall prey to rigidity and linear interpretations of process, that the heuristic process cannot proceed authentically. For myself, I feel that my heuristic inquiry started a long time before my research started, and certainly before I even knew what heuristic inquiry involves.

Synchronicities beyond what I can understand drew me into an extended phase of incubation, during which I mourned the loss of a horse, and during which time I actively did not wish to spend time around horses or even think about horses. Of course, experientially, I did not recognise this phase as an incubation. Only retrospectively, once certain tacit knowings started emerge from me, and I learned to read my inner pathways better, did I start to recognise this very important incubation in my research journey.

3.7. INBETWEENITY STRIKES AGAIN...

THEORETICAL BORDERLANDS

In introducing this section, I spoke briefly of the suggestion to use both heuristic inquiry and hermeneutic phenomenology as theoretical frameworks in this quest to work from a holistic ontology of undividedness. Here, in the borderlands between these two approaches, I would like to elaborate further.

Again from the edge, T.S. Eliot provides words of paradoxical encouragement:

“To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
...
Should say: 'That is not what I meant at all;
That is not it, at all.'”
(1917, p. 12)

I fear that I am setting myself up for failure. Research, institutionally, is the intent to squeeze all of the beauty, mystery, wonder, power and uncertainty of the universe into a ball that is tightly contained and controlled, to use this constrained ball in answer to some overwhelming question. I fear that, by the end of this, I will be stuck with those words: “That is not what we meant you to do at all, no that is not it at all!” And that I will have to say: “That is not what I

meant to do, not at all, honest!” I was just an innocent bystander who got swept away by the serious research bandwagon.

My treading on the theoretical borderlands is my attempt to challenge this hegemony of power within research, following Abes (2009), Beer (2005, 2011) and Mathews (2006, 2007). Abes (2009) insists that all theoretical perspectives which guide research are incomplete. Once a theoretical perspective is chosen, traditional knowledge indicates that one departs from there, guided as to aspects of other elements of the research process, such as data collection and analysis (Babbie, 2005; De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2005; Whitley, 2002).

Abes (2009) instead suggests that we consider experimenting with choice and application of theoretical perspectives, combining multiple and even seemingly conflicting theoretical perspectives to uncover new ways of understanding the data. Very importantly, this is not, in my view, the same as merely shuffling paradigmatic furniture. Treading the borderlands must have some purpose, if they are to be treaded at all. I argue that my edging toward liminality in theoretical perspectives is a powerful tool and reflection of this journey. First, I suggest, after Abes (2009, p. 141) that “rather than being paralysed by theoretical limitations or confined by rigid ideological allegiances, interdisciplinary experimentation of this nature can lead to rich new research results and possibilities”. Second, I choose this approach knowingly in an attempt to challenge the notion of singularity of truth or reality, to emphasise that a multiplicity of voices in an interconnected universe may best be served not by hegemonic discourse, but by interdisciplinary and intertheoretical play and experimentation. Third, and co-incidentally (synchronistically!), I found myself on the borderlands yet again, having introduced the concept already in terms of teenagers, who straddle the world of child and adult; horses, who provide the much needed vehicle of liminal transcendence; and finally the third space, as it arises in the authentic engagement between two.

Given our postmodern acceptance of multiplicity of realities, Lather (2006) argues that a multiplicity of paradigms is necessary. “Rather than searching for the common elements underlying difference,” there should be a “freeing of difference” that is about “divergence, dispersed multiplicities, the possibilities of what which is in excess of our categories of containment” (Lather, 2006, p. 47). Lather (2006, p. 47) insists further that this freeing of

difference may be a move “against the kind of methodolatry where the tail of the methodology wags the dog of the inquiry”.

Romanyshyn (1971, p. 98) argues similarly that the tendency in research has become to “define an area in terms of the methods used to investigate it”.

“It not only decides the question of how an experiment is to be conducted, but it also determines the question of what is meaningful data in the experimental situation. In effect, the choice of a particular method for a psychological experiment means the creation of a circumscribed, well-defined universe within which certain events are attended to while others are ignored.” (p. 99)

With this borderland travelling, and the decentralisation of singular perspectives in research, much messiness of course results. Rather than fear this messiness, Lather (2006, p. 52) encourages us to say “yes to the messiness, to that which interrupts and exceeds versus tidy categories...thinking difference differently”. Taking a deep breath, then, and back into the messiness...

3.8. HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

“With regard to the awkwardness and 'inelegance' of expression in the following analyses, we may remark that it is one thing to report narratively about beings and another to grasp being in their Being. For the latter task not only most of the words are lacking but above all the 'grammar'.” (Heidegger, 1953, p. 34)

I agree with Beer (2011) that in the final account, we can never know another entirely, but that we can but know ourselves, we can study the lenses through which we interpret our world, and we can reflect what these lenses have told us about the world beyond our eyes and mind through our awareness of a third space, a space created between myself and another. In wanting to know this world of the 'Other', I am creating a dichotomy which instead removes me from those I wish to engage with deeply. To my thinking, this means that the only mode through which I may attempt to connect honestly with those beyond me, is through the third

world (Irigaray, 2002). Following this, to know this third space between us, I am seriously lacking in both the words and the grammar, as Heidegger emphasised in *Being and Time* (1953, p. 34).

Indeed, any attempt in this journey to know at all, “is to feel in every possible sense of the word; intellectually, emotionally, physically” (Beer, 2011, p. 144). Some argue that the heuristic mode of inquiry and phenomenology are mutually exclusive (Beer, 2011; Frick, 1990). Heurism calls for connection and relationship, whereas traditional phenomenology, such as the philosophy of Husserl, call for detachment and description of essence (Johnson, 2000). I argue that heurism indeed requires indwelling, and that it is through this tacit knowing of the world that we may effectively use phenomenological method to describe the multiplicities of the third space we experience together with others. As Beer (2011, p. 144) emphasises, “content and method are inseparable and iterative of each other”. The desire to explore a tacit knowing of the borderland, the borderland of adolescence, the borderland negotiated by deep connection with horses, the borderland of the third space, may only be examined by an isomorphic approach: that of the borderland between heuristic inquiry and hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger's philosophy. In seeking to write between and across genres, it certainly makes sense that the tacit knowings and stories about this journey cannot be confined to a single type of seeing or approach. This approach also insists that we not commit the epistemological error of confusing the map for the territory (Bateson, 1972). An awareness that all approaches are flawed and incomplete, including this attempt, allows me to be constantly pulled back into uncertainty, to the liminal, away from a false sense of knowing completely.

Phenomenology can be understood as the aim to describe and/or understand the meaning of participant's lived experiences (Cresswell, 1998). Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the same goal, namely the life world or human experience as it is lived (Lavery, 2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology, as understood from the standpoint of Heideggerian philosophy, is focussed on *dasein*, which may be understood as the situated meaning of being human in the world (Lavery, 2003). The researcher is an active participant in the process, rather than a passive receiver of knowledge out there, fostering instead a connection between personal understandings and participant understandings (Cuffari Toukonen, 2011). Hermeneutic phenomenology involves interpretation of being-in-the-world, but not the reduction of human experiences to objective characteristics, properties or data.

How I approach the research, and how those involved in the journey approach the process, as I suggested before, is influenced by my own lenses, which from a Heideggerian view would be viewed as a preunderstanding, or a fore-structure of understanding. As interpretation takes place, it takes place as a circular process between different lenses, and between all participants in the journey (Cuffari Toukonen, 2011). Johnson (2000) emphasises that in this mode of interpretation, nothing is seen to exist in the world out there, but all are seen as part of an interconnected world of human relations. This collapse of binaries and trend towards interconnection is exemplified by the feeling of being-in-the-world, since, according to Heidegger, we only experience the world as separate on appearance, but that before the subject/object split takes place on a higher level, we are all unified with our world on a deeper level (Campbell, 2003).

Ryan (2007) suggests that the beauty of hermeneutics as an interpretive phenomenology is that it may be helpful in the development of a language for experiences which are difficult to put into words. This interpretive mode allows for the entry of metaphor, simile, imagery and movement in language, the use of multiple modes of expression, such as I have already included in this work. Heidegger felt that poetry especially could be used as a mode for describing the being-ness or essence of an experience, without losing the entirety of the feeling, or the tacit knowing of the experience (Ryan, 2007). Charalambous, Papadopoulos and Beadsmoore (2008) emphasise this point, indicating that through the use of stories and poetry, new possibilities, and multiplicities of being-in-the-world are cracked open within everyday reality. Further, Lindseth and Norberg (2004, p. 147) suggest that if we are to conduct a phenomenological hermeneutic study, “it is always about the world, an openness to the world (and of the world)”.

3.9. RESEARCH AS INDIVIDUATION

KNOWING THROUGH CONNECTION, THROUGH BEAUTY THROUGH POETRY

“In re-visioning, re-specting, and re-searching, we look at something again and again, from differing perspectives, to encompass it more fully within our gaze, to learn more fully about its nature, and to be more open to the particular truths we may glean from it.” (Braud, 1998, p. 10)

Since the first steps made in this journey, I found that research was much more than an academic and intellectual pursuit. Beyond the implications for others and the nature of connection, I found that I was learning about myself, and not only that, my own process of individuation was fully bound with this process of re-search. My life started changing, I have met people who are changing me so that I will never be the same again, I am connecting to people I thought I had lost entirely, I am learning that the world inside of me is of greater value than I ever estimated.

In short, I am learning to believe in magic, in the magic of living through my skin instead of merely surviving inside of it. Braud (1998) draws my imagination further to sea, suggesting that this process of circling around a topic, coming at it again and again from different angles as the path progresses, reminds of the process of individuation, where there is no direct route of discovery, only the constant circling around and re-discovery of the self.

One fragment of this circumambulation of self is learning that the world (and I) are in no way what we seem.

Having been convinced from a young age that I (and the world) was something less-than-I was, that there was no magic, that moments of beauty are few and far between, and that the routine and the commonplace were to be the future, I am discovering instead that both of us (the world and I), are much more than we thought we were. That instead what lies within me and beyond me is a rich and vibrant story, more sacred, more powerful, more wonderful, more exciting than anything I even imagined. I am discovering that the primary mode through which I enact the world, and the world enacts me, is through language. I am finding that the way I use language has changed.

In language, in stories, in words,
we may
restrict,

or we may
catch a little bit of star-dust,
or grasp a segment of the rainbow. (Thoreau, 1854)

As I trawl through academic texts, I am often saddened by the language-ing which takes place. Often, stories of great depth and diversity are reduced to dry, academic language; all magic, all that is sacred to the voices, lost. In this work I have endeavoured and will continue to endeavour to render my tacit knowings and the multiplicities of voices which join my own in a manner that is respectful of the *feel* of the narratives.

“The dissertation was for me both a 'way' of practicing and at the same time an 'art' of exploring, each complementing the other.” (Noy, 2003)

My attempts to respect myself and my participants are reflected too in my dissertation language-ing, providing both a way and an art to my changing self. Noy (2003) writes that for him, in his writing of his dissertation, his pull to give voice to personal experience, came to a head in his chapter on methodology. Instead of quietly remaining inside the chapter that usually delimits, contains and curtails, he allowed himself to experiment with representations. Perhaps for the very reason that traditionally, a chapter on method and theoretical framework delimits movement, I, too, have found this chapter difficult, and challenging. I, too, have found that I am no longer willing to sit back and be dictated to, but instead will insist on my own voice. Vociferously, if I must.

“I'm thinking, writing and/in/as living. Connect all the lines of the letters you wrote, the ballpoint-pen ink, fountain-pen ink, and printer ink to a long (seismographic) line of life. When it ceases – so do you. Writing like biting on something sharper than your teeth. Like scratching your skin too deep. Chasing phantoms... Writing like blowing air gently, writing like rekindling.” (Noy, 2003, p. 11).

In this, my own write of passage into adulthood, into selfhood, into academia, I wonder and am in wonder of this serious play of writing (Gurevitch, 2000; Noy, 2003).

“The poetic as a measure against any frozen form. Put it on the move, go against as you go forward, open the space preceding writing, go through the serious to become

light.” (Gurevitch, 2000, p. 5)

Poetry as a measure of resistance against the hegemony of method and theory in social research, against the hegemony of thinking inside the box of what is allowed and what is acceptable and what is academic discourse, “poetry breaking prose” (Gurevitch, 2000, p. 5). Poetry as a manner of enacting a return to the soul, as a way of the soul enacting its return to the world.

“The breaking of prose becomes the occasion for the poetical. A return to writing. A performance. A prayer. An experiment. A flight. A break-dance.” (Gurevitch, 2000, p. 5)

Remarkably, poetry bringing me back one more time to the borderland, to the liminal:

“Poetry is not only emotion and selfhood; it is ritual, magic, voice, dance, tongue, the rhythm of heartbeat (as in learning by heart). To write poetry or poetic writing means to engage in the break of language. A beginning not out of nowhere but rather out of end. The new question is not how to finalise or how to disrupt closure but rather how to begin. Poetic speech is neither talk (ethnography, narrative, theory) nor dance (magic, trance, play) but it is between them.” (Gurevitch, 2000, p. 6)

Serious play with poetry allows gaps for serendipity and synchronicity, so that what may emerge during the following sections may be magic. Like children, searching for a gap in the fence, allowing this re-search journey to become, instead of insisting upon what it must become. Writing as creation and discovery, writing as liberation. Poetry perhaps further offering advice on how to collapse the polarities which plague modernity (and me), as a way of opening self to “the world's poetic responsiveness” (Mathews, 2007, p. 7).

“It seems that the poetic order may also fairly reliably be activated by *invocation*, particularly invocation in narrative form. That is to say, the poetic order seems able to be activated by *story*, told, or better still enacted, with invocational intent.” (Mathews, 2007, p. 8) (original italics)

Following Mathews (2007) I propose invoking the dimension of tacit knowing, of

multiplicities of voices, of undivided wholeness, through singing and writing it up, and allowing myself and those in this journey with me to be drawn into story with it.

“The serious play, or the experimental, punctures any self-fulfilling gesture and returns the writer and reader to a silent ecstasy, ex-stasis, of break, enthusiasm in a broken line.” (Gurevitch, 2000, p. 7)

3.10. LEARNING BY HEART ... ALONG THE BROKEN LINE

I have highlighted my lenses, and the frameworks through which I feel this research may best be served. I have invoked the language of the poetic order, with which I hope to invite in deep stories, both from myself and from the teenagers (and the horses).

One dynamic remains in play for me. I have spoken much about the place of the subjective in research. I have spoken about my own voice being allowed a place in this text, in fact, my own voice providing a central narrative to this journey.

However, I feel the risk of this becoming only a place for my own subjective shadows to play out. Having engaged with these blind spots in my clinical training, I am aware of the value of them, but also the damage that uninformed subjectivity can cause, left to interfere blindly without interrogation.

Robert Romanyshyn (2010, p. 279) suggests that there must always be a place for unconscious dynamics in research.

“In the light, the body casts a visible shadow and in the dark the invisible shadow remains as the embodied complex of the researcher. Within the thought, there is a fantasy; within the reason, a dream, within the concept, a complex; within the idea, an image; within the meaning, a myth; within the observation, a story. The unconscious shadows our thinking.”

I have spoken much of the experiences in my life that have called me to this topic, and the

feeling of being called in turn. That which I bring to this encounter is challenged, and further challenges others. What others bring into this - challenges in me in turn. My awareness of these challenges that I bring is imperative:

“[That] which a researcher brings to a work are changed in that encounter, which in the turning of the circle changes the researcher's understanding of the work, a process that continues and has an indefinite horizon. In this context, we might describe the researcher's presence as an encircled subjectivity.” (Romanyshyn, 2010, p. 281).

If I am to conduct this research honestly, authentically, and ethically, I must find a means to bring this full complexity to the table. Anderson (2011) feels that a researcher may use their intuition to guide them in research, and that one mode of access to intuition is through our wounds. A researcher's intuitive style seems to settle along the “fault lines” (p. 25) within themselves. These fault lines may be considered the cracks, as I have mentioned before, that allow for the researcher to open to the world, enabling personal and research exploration. In allowing for movement through these cracks, it suggests a mode for us to turn our own wounding into work.

Braud and Anderson (2011) suggest that one mode of working with our experience from the inside out, is through embodied writing. Embodied writing is an attempt to give voice to those experiences not usually honoured, especially in research. Among these voices are the voices of subjectivity of the researcher herself. There are seven features which Braud and Anderson (2011, p. 269-270) consider to be particular to embodied writing:

1. True-to-life, vivid depictions intended to invite sympathetic resonance in readers. This writing invites those experiencing it to feel the writer as she experiences life.
2. Inclusive of internal and external data as essential to relaying experience. Internal sources of data, such as imaginal and visceral, as well as external sources, such as those observable by others, are both included without privileging one over the other.
3. Writing takes place from the inside out, offering an immediate fullness of experience.
4. Richly concrete and specific, descriptive of all sensory modalities, and often slowed down to capture nuance, inviting a sense of living in the here and now.
5. Attuned to the living body, living in a body that is fully attuned to the sensual

elements of the world.

6. Narratives are embedded in experiences, and as such are often first person narratives.

7. Poetic images, literary style, and cadence serve embodied depictions and not the other way around.

Beyond relaying my personal relationship and involvement in research, I also feel that the use of embodied narratives will also serve the data collection phase of this work, which I will discuss in more detail later.

Romanyshyn (2011) suggests that we, throughout our research process, remain open to the tacit knowings, imaginal intuitions, archetypal experiences, dreams and synchronicities that happen to us and occur to us. By remaining open to them, and engaging with them willingly, we are able to make meaning of them. By disregarding them, they play out silently in our research process, colouring the way we work and the way we perceive quietly. As they arise, they may guide us. If we deny them, we may sit with a false sense of certainty, but unconsciously these processes may influence our work in ways that we are not aware of.

I opened this section with an invocation to the poetic, and the heart. If this work is to remain meaningful to me, and if I have any hope for it to be meaningful to others, I must remain true to this knowing and guiding of the heart, first and foremost.

“Research, like love, is an experience of being claimed. Love happens. One does not wake up one morning and decide that today is the day he or she will fall in love. Rather, one is called into love and, in this regard, it is accurate to say that love is a vocation. In a like manner, research is a vocation. A researcher is called into his or her work, and that calling is through his or her complex, unconscious ties to the work, to those ties that have already made their claim upon the researcher.” (Romanyshyn, 2010, p. 284)

3.11. PLAYING SERIOUSLY (WITH METHOD)

Sampling Strategy

Four teenage girls who ride, work and stable their horses at the same yard where I keep my horses were asked to participate in the process. The requirements I set for participants were simple. Firstly, that they were all between the ages of thirteen and nineteen, so as to qualify as a teenager. Secondly, that all the participants had some form of meaningful relationship with a horse, or horses. The particular time frame of their participation with horse riding did not matter, nor the time they had a relationship with a horse, only that they qualitatively evaluated their relationships with their horses as meaningful and influential in their lives. Horse riding is traditionally seen as a 'girly' sport, and thus it was difficult to find adolescent boys to participate. The teenagers are all from middle class families. Horse riding, especially if done over a period of time, becomes an expensive hobby. Thus, it was not possible to include a broader demographic of participants. However, it is felt that the information regarding relationships between teenagers and horses may to some extent be extrapolated to EAP settings across many more demographics. The young people in this study had no serious clinical diagnoses. Each participant will be introduced fully in the following sections.

The Research Setting

Conversations between myself and the teenagers took place on the farm where they ride and work with their horses. I felt it important to have the discussions in as informal a setting as possible, and in a setting where the young people were naturally very comfortable and spent a lot of time. Further, I did not want to exclude the horses from a process that was so centrally about them. Although not included formally in a data collection process, I felt it important for us to have our conversations in the presence of the horses, in a space where everyone felt comfortable and at home.

The riding centre is a commercial enterprise first and foremost, where individuals board their horses for a monthly fee, and where lessons are taught in groups and individually. However, the riding centre also has a small space dedicated to informal equine healing spaces, which was mostly facilitated by my participation on the riding yard. In addition, the riding center

also had charity aspects, where some teenagers were able to ride due to charity sponsorships.

These spaces are the spaces where I got to know the teenagers initially, many of whom I have known for a number of years. This again reinforced my choice to interview on the respective properties, as well as mutual agreement from the teenagers when consulted on their suggestions.

Gathering the Data

Unstructured interviews were conducted, with the hope of informal, open conversations eliciting deep, rich information. The interviews were taped and transcribed by me. Each girl was interviewed once, for approximately an hour and a half, after which she was asked to do a post-interview (self-chosen) task. These tasks ranged from making collages, to journalling, as the co-researchers chose. These tasks were then discussed in a second individual interview, which was also an hour and a half in duration. These came to a total of eight individual interviews.

In addition to this, two focus group interviews were held with all four girls. The first was done before the initial individual interviews, and the final one after the completion of all the individual interviews. These were each about two hours long. The purpose of the initial interview was to open a space for the process that was about to start, to make initial suggestions, to explain my feelings regarding the research, to frame the research as fully co-constructed, and to make an initial check whether all the girls wanted to be part of the process. The final interview was used as a closing space. The process was reflected back upon, and group tasks were done to close the space. Further, we discussed whether the space should be closed at all, or redefined beyond the research. This interview will be reflected on in my concluding chapter.

As mentioned in previous sections, I include my own subjective experiences within these interviews, as well as reflect upon them during data analysis. Therefore, part of data collection entailed keeping a journal on the process, the contents of which will be reflected on in the data analysis and throughout the work. These reflections will take the form of autoethnographic, embodied writing extracts, integrated throughout the text, as I see them to come up in a meaningful way or to be relevant.

Data Analysis

Ryan (2007, p. 45) says about data analysis: “The data analysis is in the texts of the interviews, as well as in my personal on-going reflections. Themes and meanings have emerged from my interpretation of parts of the texts as well as the text as a whole as they each inform and give meaning to the other.” These words inform my approach to data analysis, beyond what was already discussed in preceding sections. Data was recorded, and transcribed. After transcription, I gave each interview a read-through. Thereafter, the transcriptions were all ‘rested’ until I had completed all but the final group interview. Data analysis took place by means of searching for content, process, and meta-themes within the text. These will be expanded upon in the next section.

Burgen (2011, p. 170) also says that: “In line with a participative approach, the results were shared with a number of the participants in order to verify my interpretations of their experiences.” The themes were then shared with the co-researchers, who each had a turn to work through the material, and to make suggestions regarding possible changes, or deletions.

WHY IS THIS NOT WORKING?

(stuckness & incubation)

“Because when we couldn’t see two feet in front of us,
The ability to feel was our only saving grace.”

(Kohanov, 2003, p. 67)

INTERJECTION

THE BRIDGE

Three dreams:

I am at my house, sitting on the floor. I have a feeling of complete and utter desperation, I'm at the edge of panic. For some reason, I feel that the only way I will get my goal further is to cut off my right foot. I take a knife, and I start cutting my foot off, violently and forcefully. Half-way through, the pain is too much, and I give up. I try to bandage the foot back together again, but not to much avail.

Months later, I have a follow-up 'foot dream'.

I am at a séance with a number of people. The séance is led by a woman shaman. She starts her incantations, and I am almost immediately overwhelmed by voices, speaking into my head from everywhere, calling for my attention. At the same time, I sense a presence over my left shoulder, the presence of a man in white, semi-threatening, semi-protective. The séance gets out of control, and a different, male shaman takes over. He tells us we need to relax, and he must massage our feet in order for this to happen. He takes my right foot, which he works with for a while. When he gives it back to me, he tells me that the sinews and tendons in my right foot are still too tight, and he has relaxed them.

These two dreams caused me great difficulty, as I could not figure out their significance. Yet, both were powerful and came at times in my life when I was amidst great change. Then, one day, I read that in many shamanic traditions, the right side of the body represents the masculine characteristics, those of control, of logic, of intellect, of reason. And suddenly I understood. I understood that my psyche was in the boat with me, for sure. First, telling me that I really had to shut off all this intellectual rubbish, and later, telling me that I was still too tightly grounded in

my intellect and logic. That I needed to relax my control on the world outside, that I needed to relax and let come.

The night I finished the preceding method pages, I went to bed with a strange feeling of incompleteness and loss. I felt like something was not done, and yet I knew that everything I had intended was there. The work was good, I felt. I could not place the feeling. That night, this small snippet of a dream:

I am at a horse show with some of the teenagers I intend to participate in this research with. For some reason, we are tasked with looking after a very old-looking off-white, palomino pony I knew many moons ago. The pony looked terrible, with a thick, scraggly coat and the look of real age. Even more, her eyes were almost completely blind, swollen over and white with layers and layers of cataracts. Only with great effort could she open her eyes to see, and then only a little bit.

I was troubled by this dream, and again struggled to understand its meaning. Until some prompting by my supervisor, and some time. I realised that my issue was beautifully captured by these three dreams. I'm still holding on too tightly to this mindset of logic, of reason, of intellect. I'm seeing the world as the pony, through a mirror darkly, because I'm still stuck in the preceding pages, which, much as I intend to work from the heart, are still abstract and intellectual. I need to relax the grounding of that right foot of logic and control. The white pony let me know very clearly that I was still seeing the world through that mask, that lens of reason, of control, of intellect. I still had much work to do.

I still have much work to do.

I have to build a bridge, somehow. A bridge which allows for movement between the pages above and the pages below. Somehow, I need to change my approach to this bridge. As much as this is academic, this bridge cannot be.

I do not know what this bridge will be, but I know I must find one before I can continue.

--- o0o ---

Almost a month later, still stuck and annoyed and frustrated, I became sick. And I simply had to let go of what I had surrounded myself with: books on anything from method to horses to art, pictures drawn, graphs, mind maps, all focussed on the central issue: How do I build this bridge? How do I weave this tapestry? Even in the words in the above section, I insist to myself that I have to build a bridge. Very smartly catching myself in my own net of intellect and 'must-do'. But when I got sick, I had to let-go, I had to allow (much to my initial frustrations!).

So I let go of my intellect and my clever games with poetry, much as Basho (2005) cautioned me at the onset of the chapter on method. I just continued along the line, and allowed, followed the path I could no longer resist.

Three elements emerged:

1. Linda Kohanov, in *Way of the Horse* (2007), created a set of cards, which function much along the line of tarot cards, drawing on trust in the universe, intuition and in synchronicity. Just after the completion of the above work, I did a read with these cards.
2. While sick, I allowed myself to read only one book, *The Soul's Code* (1996) by James Hillman.
3. And a dream, a dream which finally helped me here, which came happily into the space of allowing, but of course resisted all my efforts to drag it out of my unconscious!

The temptation is to explain these elements in detail, to make them make sense on these pages. To 'make' sense no longer makes any sense to me. A dream then, first, the furthest element from sense:

In this dream, an incarnation of my white horse returns. This time, she is a white/grey mare from Namibia, a country I have always known to be my spiritual homeland. She is beautiful, with long, elegant legs, a strong body,

and a fine face which tapers into delicate nostrils and intelligent ears. She is by no means a pushover. She has not been ridden, and she gives me a look of wildness, of utter untamability, rolling two white eyes at me, much as my own horse as a teenager used to do. Yet I love her, completely and utterly. And although she shoves me around, she tries to bite me, and others warn me that she will be hell to ride, I have no fear whatsoever. The opposite, I feel as if we have known each other all our lives, that we're connected by much more than those around us can see.

And I know so completely that my white horse has returned to carry me onward. She had to die, and be dismembered, in order to be reborn as someone new. At the end of this chapter, I caught a brief look at her, but she was faded, she could not see properly through the film over her eyes, and I was greatly saddened. I can't really explain how overjoyed I am to see her here, with the essence of wildness, but also so clearly happy, so clearly connected to me in ways I can barely begin to understand. It feels like now I'll be alright in this journey. Just keep following the heart-lines, and you'll be fine.

“Engineering a rational connection between the two realms may only push them further apart.” (Hillman, 1996, p. 94)

This was exactly what I was trying to do. In order to build the bridge between that and this, between me and you, between research and soul, I tried to find reason, I tried to build that bridge, brick by brick, tooth and nail, blood, sweat and tears. Perhaps I thought that if I used enough blood, a rational connection between the realms would emerge. But the feeling was never right, because I just fell and fell and fell into the trap of my thinking, instead of deferring to soul.

“A passion to cage the invisible by visible methods continues to motivate the science of psychology.” (Hillman, 1996, p. 92)

So to hell with cages.

To hell with visible means.

To hell with methods.

(it actually frightens me NO end, to say those words)

To hell with reasons.

To hell with rational connections.

This work will have methods, reasons and connections, but they will be methods, reasons and connections that serve the work, not the other way around.

“So the rationalised mind prefers the chasm to the bridge; it likes the cut that separates the realms. From inside its concrete bunker, all invisibles appear the same – and bad. (Hillman, 1996, p. 109) And since we are imagining a third force in our lives, this third can only appear concealed within the other two.” (Hillman, 1996, p. 128)

Some words of encouragement from Kohanov (2007) and Rumi (1993), from the cards that I drew that have illuminated (and are illuminating) the dimensions I am currently dancing among:

“Desperation, let me always know
How to welcome you
And put in your hands the torch
To burn down the house.” (Rumi, 1993, p. 49)

With those words, I realised that this research process was about to take a turn again. The stuckness I felt in my work was in fact not mirrored by a stuckness in my personal life, as I had felt it might be. Personally, my full-time training had ended, and I moved into an intern position at an acute psychiatric hospital. I found this work challenging, but it opened up doors and doors in my psychotherapy training. I found myself drawn ever closer to the work on my soul, drawn by dreams and synchronicities, roadmaps and signposts to my own journey of individuation. Why then, was I so stuck with the work? I realised that I had already written the answer in preceding sections, but had not been able to take my own advice at the time.

“Your psyche has a supernatural element fond of improving on timeless themes, and it can help you make sense of seemingly unexpected or challenging events.” (Kohanov, 2007, p. 215)

The truth was that as much as this work was about adolescents and their relationships with their horses, there was also work on my own adolescent self to be done. My journey of individuation at the time of adolescence mirrored their journeys closely, as I’ve noted before. I had sadness, fears and traumas from my own adolescent-equine journey to work through, and this voice had to be included here, in the data, if I was to be honest about this exploration. The final product had to mirror both my co-participants’ journeys and my own, as the two are inextricably linked. Through them, I could know myself; through myself, I could know them. Therefore, in the chapters that follow, I will weave both my own narratives and those of my co-participants. With this realisation, my work slowly became unstuck, and I could breathe again. Research became re-search again.

“Swirling between the opposites: not transcending duality exactly, but feeling, really feeling, how joy spills into sadness, how beauty emerges in suffering, and how language can never touch the mystery that informs all life.”
(Kohanov, 2007, p. 218)

“Stories are medicine.”

(Estes, 1992, p. 14)

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEMES

In this following section, I discuss the themes that emerged from this co-research process. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed by myself. The themes were then given to the co-researchers to look over, in order to make any changes or suggestions as they felt were necessary. These themes here are the result of this working together.

I have divided the themes into three main groupings. The first group of themes are themes that emerged directly from the content of the interviews. These are the greatest in number. These themes were further divided into sub-themes for the sake of order and understanding. However, often themes overlap between different categories, such as: horses, adolescents or an integration of both. In these cases, I have placed them with the category where they seem to fit most comfortably. Within this content grouping, themes were also analysed on different levels. Some of these themes refer to adolescents and their relationships with horses, some refer to my own individuation experiences and their overlap with the co-researchers' experiences, and some further reflect on a wider ecological context that hold these themes. These contexts are primarily the psychotherapeutic context, and the research context, which are the basic spaces which support this exploration.

The second group of themes are themes that emerged from the process of the research and the interviewing. These were themes not directly linked to the content that emerged, but rather that emerged as global themes which seemed to be relevant to the research process. These themes are fewer in number, and offer an overview of some of the difficulties and questions which emerged from the research itself.

The third group of themes I have decided to call meta-reflections and ethics themes. These themes often link back to content and process themes, are explored in more detail. This exploration includes reflections on the process of the research as it was done, as well as some ethical difficulties and questions that were raised as this process took place. These themes reflect the work about the work, which is why I decided to name them meta-reflections. They

are also fewer in number, but reflect a global view of this research, my process, research in general, and ethical considerations.

4.2. WORKING WITH THEMES FROM CONTENT

HORSES AS...

Horses as Holding Space

Generally, horses seemed to serve as a support base and a mediating factor for the girls in their difficulties. Often, when discussing boys, relationships, school and friends, horses emerged as the 'neutral space', kind of like a time-out area, where all other worries are mediated and neutralised. This did not mean that the problems went away, but rather that the space of being around the horses provided something of a holding space for them in their difficulties.

Steph: When you're having a PMS-moment, what happens with you and the horses then?

Lexi: I ride.

Amber: I go on outrides. Or like take a friend on an outride and just talk and talk.

Janine: It really works when you just talk to your horse.

With some of the girls, horses seemed to fill the role entirely of holding space. When things went wrong with anything in their lives, they knew that the horse space would be able to hold that, and allow them to vent their unhappiness and frustrations, their hopes and fears. For other girls, horses, relationships and friends seem to take a similar space in their lives. At times they would take their difficulties elsewhere, to friends or partners.

Further, it seems that the horse alone is not always the only supportive factor, but the environment around them too. Often, the girls spoke about coming to the farm when they were feeling down, knowing that merely being in the 'horsey air' would be soothing, and that

knowing that their horsey peers would be present would also make them feel better about difficult times. “Going on outrides”, illustrates this very well. An outride means not riding in the arena or training, but going out into the property around the farm, which is undeveloped and has a large area of veld to ride in unrestrained. Here, there are paths to follow, grassy areas for galloping, as well as wooded areas where it is cool and feels inherently calm. The area is large, incorporating rivers and two small hills and valleys. Also in this area are old ruins, which have entered into the local mythology of the riding school. Often, when feeling stressed or tired and just not in the mood, some riders will go on an outride together. Sometimes this would include lots of riding, galloping and jumping over obstacles; at other times, it would merely mean ambling along and having quiet time with your horse or talking with a friend. To go on an outride would almost mean a suspension of reality, a way of escaping stresses and worries. An outride becomes something of a magical space. The elements there include the horse, but also the environment itself, which is natural and peaceful. Added to this are sometimes extra friends, which are often known as outride-friends, as the girls are quite specific about whom they prefer to be with in this space.

I remember this space being very similar for me as a teenager. At times of worry and sadness, I would saddle-up my horse, or go without a saddle, and ride away from all my worries for a few short hours. Sometimes, this would be a space to think, or to talk to your horse. At other times, it provides a safe and private space to have a cry or even scream out your frustration. Sometimes, my horse and I would walk along calmly for hours; at other times, we’d gallop as fast as we could away from home, as if the mere act of running would put more distance between myself and the things I wanted to escape. Importantly, although the space is inherently a riding and horse space, it isn’t only about that. Sometimes, I would get off and walk for kilometres with my horse, other times we’d sit down by a river, and my horse would eat grass while I sat quietly beside her. A very important characteristic of the space was the unconditional positive regard that horses always provided, which reminds me of Roger’s (Chardonens, 2009) conditions of worth for therapy. In a sense, this was a therapeutic space, with the horse and the environment acting as co-therapists at the time.

When thinking of this healing space, and the effects it had on me as a teenager (and still does), hearing it reflected in the words of the co-researchers, I realise that this space, which is so difficult to articulate, is exactly the sensual knowing healing space that I spoke of earlier. But this is a difficult concept, as it cannot be quantified or measured, but rather must be tacitly known, feeling-sensed. This reminds me of what Kohanov (2003, p. 30) speaks of in

Riding between the Worlds, “the subtler and more irrational the information, the more significant it’s likely to be”.

Horses as Alchemical Containers

The girls responded differently to the effects of riding on them when they were in a bad mood or difficult stage of their lives. They all agreed that they loved riding when they were in a good mood, because then they enjoyed it more, and their horses worked better for them and they worked better together. However, Amber felt that riding when in a bad mood wasn’t a preferable option, because she was more likely to lose her temper with the horse, become impatient, and then feel very guilty about it after the ride. She also often felt that her horse worked more poorly when she was in a bad mood, reflecting her own inner turbulence and ungroundedness back to her. Janine also felt that riding when already stressed wasn’t a good idea. She felt that she had quite a short temper, and when already stressed, that temper would flare up when riding, and would not be conducive to good interactions between her and her horse. However, Megan and Lexi both felt the opposite, where riding was good for them even when they were in a difficult space, because it distracted them, and gave them something to work on.

From the way that they spoke and my own experiences, I also sense that it’s more than just a distracting space, but rather a process during which they were able to transmute their frustrations into something more workable. In this sense, the riding space almost provided a alchemical container in which to allow a movement from dark to light, or at least a space to work with the darker emotions (Cesarotti, 2011). Again, this reminds me of the space created in psychotherapy by the therapeutic alliance, where transmutation takes place during the journey of individuation and becoming oneself, through working with the dark emotions, and allowing the process to transmute them when the time is right (Cesarroti, 2011)

The Relationship with a Specific Horse

Important to all the co-researchers was the horse that they worked with, the horse that they loved. Although they loved and enjoyed time with all the horses on the farm, there was a special link between them and that chosen horse.

"Because he's like a father to me."

"Tokyo is like my child. But he plays different roles too. Sometimes he's my friend, sometimes he's my child."

"It sounds weird, but I can't compare it to something. Like, I just love him so much. I can't compare it to anything. Love. Like I can't compare the love I have for him to anything else. He's my everything." (throws her arms out wide)

"Well, right now the space isn't so much about horses, it's about Luna. If it wasn't for him, I'm not sure I'd even be here. And I have, for a while now, been pretty sure that he's my last horse. I feel like there's no barrier or boundary. I also feel like there's no need for him to hide anything from me. He's very open like that. He's my friend. He's my brother. He's everything."

Their words remind me so much of my own, words I wrote just after I'd lost my first horse, my best friend, my mother, my father, my soul-mate:

"I said after Rainbow I never want to see a horse again."

"I miss my outrides into unknown territory, way back, so far that I'm lost and further still. I miss the dam and the crazy out-of-control galloping, climbing up a hill I know I can't get down, going into properties I know I'm not allowed into. And I miss the mountains, trudging up them, finding the air fresher, my soul freer. I miss Rainbow so much I want to die every moment of my life."

This does not take away from the therapeutic processes and healing that can take place between humans and horses in EAP and other therapies. But what these words do reflect to me is the depth of healing that can take place once that bond has deepened. All these girls, myself included, feel a vast depth of connection to one, perhaps two horses, and these horses become everything, they fill the roles that we feel are lacking in our own lives, they fill the empty spaces with their magic and their healing energy.

"That was a steep hill.

That was a broad valley.

That stretch between water holes.

...

You cancel these distances.

You make the way level.

You abolish loneliness.”

In *Song to my Horse*, quoted above (2004, p. 42), Jessie Haas captures this feeling beautifully. That there is something magical about the connection with horses, but that it deepens as we learn to love and trust that particular horse. This brings me back to an unarticulated research question, one that might have become subsumed in my fears to make this work somehow more acceptable and more scientific. What is it between this child and this horse? What is the magic between these two entities, who found each other between thousands, and learn and hurt and work and laugh and cry together, sometimes for a few short weeks, sometimes for years and years?

I have already shared my story about how my horse, Rainbow, and I found one another. Perhaps it is time to share two other stories of this connection.

Amber was about nine years old when Tinkerbelle came to the riding school. He was to be trained and re-sold as a show pony, but Tinkerbelle clearly had different ideas from the start. He had been started and trained cruelly, to say the least, and was now a terror to ride. The picture of an unhappy soul was clear to see: a pony that ran away when humans came close to him, stood frozen in stiff fear when touched or saddled, ran away when a human tried to mount him, and tried to run whenever possible when being ridden. A very sensitive pony, stuck in a very insensitive environment for too long. Amber was already a mirror to her pony, although she did not know it yet. She was a nervous and sensitive rider, very small, very young and very inexperienced at such a young age. The two had the same look in their eye. Through no rational decision whatsoever, but for a gut feeling, Amber and Tinkerbelle were introduced to one another. The bond was instant and permanent. From their first day together, these two were inseparable, working with each others’ sensitivities and anxieties, building a bond that was enviable. They had difficult times; Tinkerbelle contracted a viral illness and nearly died, financial issues almost saw the pony sold, Amber fell off many many times during their bonding phase. There was pressure on the pair to compete, but Tinkerbelle would always be too nervous to compete. Amber never wavered in her commitment to her pony. There was pressure on Amber to get a larger, more suitable horse, but she remained

utterly loyal to this pony who was her everything. In truth, they became everything to each other. I believe it is within that bond, that they healed one another, in a reciprocal relationship that defies language.

Megan had been riding for many years, and stood on the verge of stopping due to a number of traumatic falls. Through a stroke of luck, Luna came into her life, and he was a teenager extraordinaire. He was prone to stubborn tempers, and would try every trick in the book to unseat his rider. He had never had a stable relationship with another human being, and distrusted all humans fiercely and indiscriminately. From day one, Megan would have to prove herself to him, or else. Megan chose to ride him, although she was herself very nervous of horses at the time. Over the next eighteen months, a miraculous relationship was built. Luna was by no means a pushover, and gave Megan all her time when riding, and when working with him on the ground. He would stop and refuse to move when ridden, bucking and rearing violently when any pressure was applied to convince him otherwise. On the ground, he would continuously run over Megan or away from Megan, in an attempt to establish a serious dominance over this human who dared interact with him. During these eighteen months, these two teenagers played out all their frustrations, their disappointments, and stucknesses on one another, and what emerged was two equal partners, two almost exact mirrors of one another.

Circular Relationships

Something the girls often wondered about and puzzled about was the circular relationship between themselves and the horses. After speaking about how horses react when they are in a bad mood, I then wondered how they know if their horses are in a bad mood themselves. An interesting observation that came from that was that the girls sometimes doubted their place and impact on their horses. They knew that their horses impacted them very deeply, but wondered how deeply they impacted their horses. Could they, as humans, also be their horses' best friends, could they make their horses feel better when they were unhappy?

It seemed that at times, the girls almost wanted to underplay the impact that they clearly had on their horses, seeing their interactions as linear (horse to human), instead of circular. At times, they could see that their moods affected their horses, and that their being tense often

resulted in their horses. However, they seemed to struggle to feel that they impacted upon their horses in a positive way.

I wondered why this was the case. I know from my own perspective that I sometimes wonder about the power differential inherent in horse-riding, and whether riding can ever truly be a reciprocal relationship. I know that, since I have started becoming more aware of these discomforts within myself, I have been more willing to interrogate them in the relationship with my horse. I often find myself asking questions like; “Does he really feel like doing this today?”, “Does it make him feel angry when I insist that we move from one place to the next, when he is clearly happy to stay and graze where he is?”. I find myself constantly seeking to be in a more egalitarian relationship with my horse, asking more frequently whether our interactions serve me, or us.

This question has far reaching consequences, as Kohanov (2007, p. 35) emphasises:

“Throughout history, the image of a man on a horse has symbolised the intellectual and moral superiority of mind ruling the animal passions of the body. Here, the horse represents instinct, emotion, and intuition, qualities most of us were taught to rein in.”

Again, I am surprised by the iterative qualities of this journey, where on the deepest level, my relationship with my horse, again reflect my inherent distrust of grand narratives and dualities in thought and feeling. My relationship with my own horse now reflects an awakening to the deeper tacit knowings of emotion and intuition. However, in a constant striving for balance, to find that third space between, a complete rejection of the image of thought, of intellect, of control and power, would not be functional either, but rather an oscillation between two dual poles. In my relationship with my horses, as in the co-researchers’ relationships with their horses, a balance must be found in this circularity of co-influence.

Another question arises, from an equine-assisted therapy perspective. If we are to use horses in therapy, what are the power and hierarchical dynamics to be aware of? If we see horses as mere tools of therapy, as some schools of thought do, do we then inherently assume that the human therapist is dominant, the horse is a tool, or co-therapist, and the client is there to be given a service, in a linear, uni-directional manner? If we shift perspective, the field becomes more complex, but also more subtle, where horse and therapist take equal roles as healing facilitators, and are hierarchically no different from one another. Furthermore, from a second order cybernetic ethical perspective, if those in the healing space are constantly co-facilitating

and co-resonating, can we then truly say that the horse and therapist only influence the client? Reciprocally, all are bound in the healing space. This raises questions of future practice from a practical as well as an ethical perspective. The very same issues emerge within this research space, in the words of the co-researchers, who are all in a state of flux as to the nature of the relationship between horse and human.

While we were discussing the role that the girls felt they played in their horses lives, they mentioned the fact that they hoped that they were a positive influence on their horses lives. They were also clearly very protective of their horses, always wanting to make sure their horses had the best field, the best friends, the best food and enough water and carrots to last them a lifetime. Often, they also felt angry if their horses were in less than ideal circumstances, according to them:

"I want Tinkerbelle to have the best of everything. I was not happy when he was in his old field, because he did not have enough shade, a friend, and his field was very small."

"I'm very protective of them. I want them to have the perfect life, I know it's hard, but I want them to be outside every day all day, and I get mad when they only go to their fields later in the day. I also asked Matthew (the worker who works with her horse), if there's a storm, to please grab my horse first and run to his stable."

Their horses' wellbeing is very closely linked with their own, and, stepping into a parental role, they try to ensure that they can protect and care for their horses in the best way possible. Allowing them to practice these skills of caring, determination, courage and ingenuity, they often go to great lengths to achieve these conditions. Some examples include: working on Saturdays and school holidays to earn extra money, helping out at farm events in order to achieve favour, going to the farm even when ill or tired instead of resting, and often spending late hours and early mornings in the farm preparing and caring for their horses, sometimes to the detriment of a social life or school work. Our discussions were often punctuated with stories where horse time came first, and homework or studying had to happen late at night or during break time the next day.

In return, the horses seem to feel the same way. Amber tells an interesting story:

“Well, once, I was sitting on him, and this other guy came up to talk to me, and Tinkerbelle pulled his ears back at this guy.”

When horses pull their ears back, they signal fear and displeasure, but it's also a subtle threat. Pulling ears back is tantamount to a human saying “Back off, or you're going to get it.” Amber felt that this was Tinkerbelle protecting her, wanting to move this person, whom for whatever reason he distrusted, away from the human he felt most close to. Depending on the horse and the rider, these stories are often told. Many a teenager has a story of bringing their boyfriend along to the yard, or to a horse show, and having a terrible day of it. I remember once listening to a friend say “I should never have brought my boyfriend, I should have known my horse would be jealous.” This ‘jealousy’, which is a human characteristic we place onto our horses, nonetheless seems to make sense. In a herd, horses will protect one another if threatened by outside forces. The first line of defence is usually ear pulling in threat, followed by more serious physical threats thereafter. It's also interesting how horses don't always become protective, but somehow can sense when a person should be trusted, or kept at bay. Again, I wonder whether they sense trustworthiness as a form of congruence in others.

Congruence/Incongruence

“Just don't think about it, you just have to do. Ride now, think later. Stop overthinking, that's all I can say.”

Something that all the co-researchers agreed with, myself included, was the need to let go of thinking and planning, and to go with the flow, when working with horses. Horses, by their immediate responses to incongruence, make it very difficult to have a highly intellectualised mind-set when working with them. They then often mirror the emotions which are lurking behind the intellectual process. Yet, when we respond to the horse in a congruently emotional manner, our relationship deepens, and becomes more important and meaningful, not to mention more enjoyable. This is also one of the qualities that makes the horse such a powerful healer and co-therapist within the healing and therapeutic space.

“They teach me to go beyond thinking in my head space...to my heart space.”

The 'Thing' with Horses

One thing that all the co-researchers vehemently agreed upon was that people did not understand their 'thing' with their horses.

"But I think they obviously see it from another perspective, people that don't ride don't understand that relationship between rider and horse. They just think, oh, you trot a little bit, do this, do that, that's not how it is. It's not like that at all, and I don't think people that don't ride can understand that."

"My one friend, she doesn't care at all. Often, when I've ridden a show, I like it when people ask me how it was, but she never has. So one day I brought her along, and she just couldn't stop talking about it afterwards. They don't understand the relationship until they physically see it."

"People don't see the horses, they just see it as the person telling the horse what to do."

"You can't explain your relationship with your horse to somebody. They find it weird. I often say, people have children, they love their children. That's how I feel about Tinkerbelle. I love him like my child, but more."

This was quite a sore point for most of the co-researchers, because they felt that their relationships with their horses were so important and so central in their lives, and yet were largely unacknowledged.

The 'thing' with horses is a difficulty that I have experienced personally and professionally. I think that it still reflects a mind-set of 'a horse is "just" an animal', and all the implications thereof. Personally, I struggled with this especially when my horses were sick, and those around me did not understand why this affected me so powerfully. I would often take time off from work or studies to spend time with my sick horses, and this would cause tension between myself and those who see animals as lower in the ecological hierarchy than humans.

This human-centric way of thinking translates into the field of psychotherapy, too. Animal assisted therapy in general is considered an addition, and a somewhat strange one, to the field of psychotherapy. Equine assisted psychotherapy is becoming more widely accepted within the field of psychology, but this only after a fierce battle to 'prove' itself, and the battle is still

on-going. Even within the field of equine therapy, some believe that horses are ‘just’ horses, and at best co-therapists, or tools, to be used in therapy. There is still very little exploration and appreciation for the field emerging in this study, and in similar work such as that of Kohanov (2013) and Pike (2009). I believe that as humankind shifts its view of animals from mindless commodities, to equal partners on planet earth, this shift will reverberate throughout the different fields of study, psychology included. It is heartening to see these shifts already taking place in the fields of healing, neo-shamanism and ecological psychology.

Dream-Space

“Horses take up a lot of my dream-space.”

These words echoed so powerfully when they were said, although the co-researcher said them so quietly at the time, I had to ask her to repeat the statement. It was said silently, under her breath, almost as if she wasn’t sure if such talk was permitted.

Horses don’t just fill a practical space of doing and exercise, and they don’t just fill a space of friend, partner, parent, child, teacher. They move more deeply, into a real that is truly transcendent. They move into our dream spaces. This is touching upon the bedrock of the tacit knowing, the feeling sense of the value I started this entire project upon. Horses are carriers of transcendence, moving between spaces and also between realms. They carry these adolescents not only on the journey of learning and doing, but they move with them into different realms, the realms of dreaming, of daydreaming, moving beneath the explicit into the numinous. To enter into the dream-space is a numinous experience, and the horses entered into it so gracefully and subtly.

Here, too, is a place that cannot be created. One cannot create a dream-space within equine assisted therapy and healing. One can facilitate a space where such transcendence might take place, but the magic is, this dream-space will come of its own accord, or not at all. This moves us beyond the realm of therapy, to the realm of healing. Traditionally, this is not a realm where therapeutic practitioners are comfortable, for different reasons. However, I suggest that this realm enters therapy spaces, bidden or unbidden. It isn’t always present, it isn’t always powerful, but it does enter. In this sense, we as practitioners need to choose how we respond to this dream-space. Do we reject it as fanciful and subjective, as something beyond our scope of experience? To we accept it, and allow this dream-space to facilitate the

therapeutic space further? I don't think there are easy answers to these questions, and I think these questions mirror a larger movement within psychology - that there are realms and places in healing that necessarily overlap with psychology, whether we like it or not. The field of equine assisted therapy isn't the only field coming into contact with the dreamspace, with the numinous, within therapy. What do we do with this numinous moment? Can we sit in this numinous moment and let it take us, heal us?

Mirroring: They Reflect Me

"They are me."

This comment followed my discussion with one of the co-researchers about her collage that she made to signify her feelings regarding being a teenager in transition, and her relationship with her horses. She had omitted herself from the collage, putting a few pictures of her riding, and mostly her horses in centre stage. When I asked about this, she responded that *they are me*, and was somewhat surprised that I would ask such a question. Again, I think it shows the depth of relationship between the girls and their horses. But I think it goes further than that, to a level of identity. It's difficult to be in transition, and it's even more difficult to be constantly in transition regarding self and becoming. Adolescence is filled with these challenges to identity, and it seems that the horses support this individuation phase. They do this through relationship support, but I think that they also offer an identity to their partner. Through knowing our horses, we know ourselves. A folk anecdote often repeated is: show me your horse and I will show you who you are.

Through identifying traits and characteristics in our horses that we admire, their beauty, their freedom, their courage, we can touch upon those identifiers within ourselves, and identify with them more easily. In the circle of becoming, we become more and more deeply enmeshed, such that I think we often would not know who we were, were it not for our horses. In this individuation phase, where we are able to test different personas through our horses, it allows us a freedom to experiment. Yet, it also provides a space for getting stuck in a particular persona, identifying only with some characteristics and never learning about our authentic self.

I certainly had times in my own journey where this was true, and moving from one rigid persona to another was as powerful as a death. I think this may be another reason why

leaving a particular horse might also be so traumatic, as we lose those identifiers, we lose the horse that signified the existence of our persona to us. This reminds me of a young woman I met during my training, who had lost a horse at the age of sixteen, and had become absolutely adrift thereafter. Of course, we may debate on many reasons why this was so, but I will always remember the metaphor that arose in our discussion: that losing this horse had left a hole in her, a screaming vacuum where once some semblance of completion had been. She then had to face herself beyond her persona as enacted by her horse, and facing her own self became a long and perilous journey for her.

Projections

Horses always seem to accept our projections with such grace. During our discussions, we called our horses our children, our fathers, our mothers, our friends and our teachers. But we put other roles onto them too. I often call my black mare, Vanity, a rebel and a feminist; I often say that she's aloof when she's in a bad mood. My gelding, The Boss, I call the dude, and I imagine him as a Rastafarian on the beach with dreadlocks, smoking marijuana. I have a friend who calls her one pony 'the outsider', because he always falls just outside the herd and never quite in it. The girls projected such characteristics onto their horses as stubborn, jealous, annoyed, frustrated and in-love.

This does not take away from our horses' unique personalities, which they certainly have. Within a herd, even a modern herd as the horses in our yard comprise, horses learn to differentiate themselves from the homogeneity of the larger herd, as we do, becoming individuals with their own quirks, their own frustrations and tolerances, their own angers and joys, their specific friends and their specific habits. These personalities are as different as our own, as unique and as much to be respected.

However, we do still project onto our horses, as we human beings do daily onto one another. I think this projection is important in adolescence. In adolescence, we have the characteristics of a child, and we have the characteristics of an adult. We are in the process of becoming, and in that process we test many different personas for size, as we test shoes and clothes. Horses provide something of a store-mannequin to us, a slate onto which to project these test personalities: the outsider, the rebel, the dude, the heroine, the bitch, and many others. In providing a surface that still has its own personality, but does not outrightly

reject the projections, the horses allow us to work through these personas, both the ones we finally accept, as well as the ones we reject. They help us to work with the superficial, but they also help us with our taboo feelings, our archetypal shadow. Every person can remember an instance where she lost her temper entirely with her horse, and smacked him for no good reason, and felt like a complete monster after the event. Every person can remember a time when they rode, and asked something of their horse that they knew their horse could not do. Every person has these stories about their interactions when their taboo feelings came bubbling up to the surface: rage, disgrace, shame, violence. Our horses, being congruent, reject these projections through shying away from us briefly, or reacting with tension or anger themselves. However, they do not reject us. They never reject *us*. As soon as the behaviour or the feelings have been worked through, the horses behave as if nothing ever happened. Within reason (barring serious abuse), horses don't hold grudges, they don't hold our tempers against us, and they don't begrudge us our necessary learning. Through this acceptance of our shadow-stuff, we learn that even our taboo natures, even those things that we are ashamed and scared of, are still part of us. They cannot be rejected, they must be worked with in individuation.

"Maybe he (my horse) just charmed me out of my senses. I dunno. I think partly because he's a challenge and he appeals to a part of me. And I think because he's a lot like me. He's stubborn as all hell. He's intelligent enough that I can actually relate to him. He's like a cute little boy in that he has these times when he's unbelievably naughty, and then he's unbelievably cute, you know things like that. He just is. He just is."

Again, this reminds me of the therapeutic space. In therapy, one is more often than not confronted with behaviour, fantasy and feeling that is taboo, that falls outside of the norm. Sometimes, we face things that are socially abhorrent to us, such as abuse or molestation. Yet, in the same way that horses do not condone the behaviour, but still accept the person, the therapist must also deal with these things as they arise in the space. Only in a space where we can show our light and our darkness can we finally learn that we are whole, and not only good or bad. Only in a space where we can show both our beauty and our ugliness can we learn that there is no duality, only complementarity, or the inter-dependence of opposites. A therapist who only accepts the good of a client runs the risk of splitting this client even

further. The horse as co-therapist can facilitate this enantiodromic principle holistically and with patience, something each rider has discovered in one form or another.

Guardian Angels and Shared Wounds

“They’re our guardian angels. I do believe they are guardian angels, they came to us in this form.”

Our guardian angels in horse form take a special role in our healing and protection. Not a single co-researcher could disagree that they felt their horses were somehow their protectors, all the way from their sheer size, which they submit so willingly to us, to their transcendent abilities, which they use to carry us through transition, from one sphere of life to the next.

In the modern world, horses fill many different roles. They are sometimes still animals of labour, they are competition animals, they are business investments, but they are also firm friends, guardians, therapists and healers to us humans. Sometimes, they even heal us whether we choose to believe it or not.

But our guardian angels carry their own wounds. For thousands of years, they were used as beasts of burden, they were ridden and worked cruelly, they were ridden into war, they were worked to death. Even today, horses are often no less than commodities: animals at stud, an expensive racehorse, a prized competition animal. Often, horses are not acknowledged for their immense sensitivity and abilities, and they suffer under this unimaginative, narrow-minded way of existing.

Many of our own horses had difficult beginnings. Four of the horses involved and mentioned often in this research are retired racehorses, which means they were more likely than not worked too hard too early in their lives, backed and trained with careless or possibly cruel methods, were forced to compete when not physically or emotionally mature enough to do so, and discarded when not performing adequately on the race track. We experience these scars still today, through animals who struggle to relax and trust, who are often difficult to ride due to fear, who retain their fear at a cellular level in tense muscles, who have sensitive backs that are often painful, and a number of other physical and emotional difficulties. As I mentioned before, two other horses involved in this research were both backed under difficult

circumstances, the one learned to fear humans intensely, the other learned to hate humans in equal measure.

Our horses themselves carry collective and individual wounds. It is, I believe, precisely through these wounds, that they can become the wounded healers of our hearts that they are today. But, as Kohanov (2007, p. 203) suggests, “to experience the power of [the wounded healer] intelligence manifesting through these animals, we must ultimately be willing to see them as sentient beings with a destiny all their own, an ability to take care of their own, and a remarkable talent for taking care of us.”

This is a step well removed from the horse as tool in therapy, moving towards a truly circular, inter-connected, co-resonant experience of healing. I feel that this remarkable process is sometimes touched upon in this research exploration, for the simple fact that a therapeutic process was not examined, which would have narrowed the scope of what could be seen. Instead, the beauty of the transformative relationship was seen for what it was, and, excitingly, the therapeutic characteristics were still present. “When we recognise and nourish the gifts behind their wounds, horses reveal themselves to be strong, capable, whole – and we can’t help but be transformed by the process” (Kohanov, 2007, p. 204.). As a change of language may change experience, we may deepen and see the bond between adolescents and horses further: when we recognise and nourish the gifts behind their wounds, adolescents reveal themselves to be strong, capable, whole – and horses can’t help but be transformed by the process.

Horses as Continuously Present

While Janine and I were discussing her collage, she explained to me why her collage was in the format that it was, and a potent metaphor emerged, one which encompasses her horse’s role in her life:

“Yes, it’s interesting and quite cool. He (my horse) is in the background, and you could easily take away the quotes or the poem in the foreground. But the horse, who takes up the entire background, is difficult to take away. And that’s how it is for me, because horse riding will always be there, I’ll never be able to exchange it for anything else...it will

always be there for me and he (my horse) will always be there for me. That's why he's in the background, and the quotes are on top. But the quotes can change."

Horses hold the background, or the foundation of her life and her journey. In a journey full of change, which is indeed by its very nature transitional, most things remain superficial. Fashion, phones, films, fads, they make an impact for a while, but they don't make a lasting impression. Friends, boyfriends and hobbies often last longer, but eventually go a similar route.

"I put it down to how changeable I am, and it sounds terrible to voice it out like that, but I lose interest in things after a while, I get bored very quickly."

As the phases of adolescence progress, identities are tried on and discarded, life paths are tested and rejected. But, during this time, some things stick. These are the things that facilitate the rest of the difficult journey, but which most often also become part of us for the rest of our lives. To these girls, horses were one of these things. They were tried on for size, and they were found to fit perfectly, as if they had been there all along. The horses became the foundation, the safe space from which to explore and change with security.

Bridges to the Soul

"My self-image is very low. Ja, I think I don't have a lot of self-confidence, I always wonder what others are thinking about me, take everything very personally."

I sometimes wonder how the paradox is possible: here is a beautiful young woman, capable of compassion, able to work with a half a ton animal with confidence and authority, able to earn the respect of a horse; but tormented between her peers, doubting her looks, her opinions, her very right to existence.

But then I think about how these two worlds respond to self-doubt. Generally, adolescents are not very forgiving, especially not when in a group. To feel doubtful about yourself, or to feel insecure, these are not feelings that will be accepted in a normal female peer group. In a group of adolescent girls, self-confidence is required for survival, and if you don't have it, you will have to fake it until you make it. Learning to pretend to be what the group requires carries advantages: more friends, social acceptance, popularity. To be insecure and scared, or

to live your own truth, invokes the opposite: a loss of friends, support and popularity. Is it any wonder then, that most adolescent girls are more interested in becoming what the group requires from them, instead of what they want for themselves?

On the other hand, horses respond quite differently to ‘fake it until you make it’ behaviour. They don’t read it as self confidence, they read it as incongruence, sensing a difference between the overt behaviour and the deeper feelings. Horses respond to any congruence in the same way – they aren’t comfortable with it, and will most likely try to avoid such a person, or become numb to such a person, or even at times domineering and aggressive depending on the horse. Behaving in a way that is incongruent with what you feel, to a horse, is a threat, and they move away from the incongruence. However, when you acknowledge your authentic feelings at the time, be they fear or confidence, you will be accepted and positively rewarded for your congruence. Further, horses have an innate ability to encourage activation of the authentic self, and engagement with authentic emotions. Simply, it’s very hard to lie to a horse, “this is the beauty, and the eternal frustration, of working with horses: they’re four-legged authenticity meters” (Kohanov, 2007, p. 26).

It seems to me then that the paradox lies more in the paradoxical expectations of society, than in what I see in these young women in their attempts to individuate. In society, we are rewarded for pretending to be something that we are not. With horses, we are rewarded for being true to our authentic selves. Horses then, provide a space where we can practice being real. When I’m feeling like a worthless piece of flesh, I’m allowed that feeling at that time. When I’m feeling confident and able, I am allowed that confidence and ability too. Both light and dark feelings are accepted by horses, and this returns to the basic conditions of worth, so valuable in any authentic, meaningful relationship: unconditional positive regard. To be accepted by a horse, at my worst and best moments, allows me to become the full me, not only the perfect, concrete, rigid picture that society expects. Even more, if horses allow me to practice my true self, to engage with my true self, there is the possibility that this space will allow me the confidence to one day practice my authentic self everywhere, and know that I am good enough as I am.

“I compare myself terribly to the people around me.”

“I think Tokyo is a constant and my father isn’t, because although my dad will always be there, but there are times that he will make comments about stuff. The two relationships are very far from each other.”

It’s quite difficult to talk about, even retrospectively read, about relationships which should be unconditional, but aren’t always that way. Some co-researchers certainly found that their horses were their only unconditional supporters, and were very aware of the tension accompanying this awareness. These words remind me of the poem that one of the participants chose to include in their collage, *Invictus*, by William Ernest Henley.

“It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.” (1997, p.133)

And these words bring me to the central organising theme of this entire exploration, I believe: I sense it’s no coincidence that one participant chose to superimpose this poem over a picture of her and her horse. Horses, be they in pictures, in real life, in riding, in therapy, bring us closer to that word that has become all but popular in the culture we live in today, especially the Western culture.

That word is Soul.

“I will see
All there is to see.
I’ll be free.
I’ll be free.” (Haas, 2004, p. 36)

To use the word Soul invokes religion, which is not something I necessarily wish to invoke here. When I refer to soul, I refer to that personal feeling-sense, that knowing, that belief in something transcendent, in something quite beyond the ordinariness of everyday existence. I think to us all, our access to Soul is different, but the feeling might be more similar than we think. Soul is very closely linked to our authentic self, and to the transcendent. That

something that we perceive which is beyond ourselves, but that we can only feel through access to our real self.

There isn't much place/space for this talk in academia, and so I feel the usual qualm of discomfort when I move into this realm. In my own story, Soul has made a fairly recent resurgence, intimately tied in with my own becoming, with my research, with my training as a psychotherapist, my draw towards the deeper modes of knowing and healing.

“If there is an aspect of the mind that is indeed nonlocal, then this entity comes to resemble the soul – something that is timeless, spaceless and immortal... Unravelling the nonlocal nature of the mind is not just an exercise in psychology or science; it is an exercise in spirituality as well, because of the soul-like nature of mind that is nonlocal.” (Dossey, 1989, p.2)

Horses are indeed the shamans that bridge the worlds. In my journey, they bridge many worlds: between depression and returning to the real world of feeling and living, between different split off aspects of my soul, between stuckness and becoming, between the concrete and the transcendent, swirling archetypal energies I'm only learning to trust now. For the adolescents, they facilitate an archetypal rite of passage, a transition between the world of a child and the world of a young adult. But this is so much more than a rite of passage into young adulthood. It's also the right of passage from girl to woman, from discordant images resembling a self to a true authentic self.

Soul is felt during those numinous moments, those moments that transcend meaning-making and description:

“If you've had a bad day, and you don't want to talk to anyone, then you ride. Then you have alone time, even though you're with an animal, it's your alone time. You communicate, not quite by reading minds, but something like that, actually you do read each other's minds.”

“I had been waiting so long just to sit on Tinkerbell.”

“Maybe...we're in the middle of the onion, and the layers around us are the horses keeping us together.”

“When I'm with him, I feel like there's no barrier or boundary.”

"...it's not really happiness or sadness, it's almost painful, it's almost masochistic, it's painful but it's also amazing and wonderful. I wouldn't say it's an emotion so much as emotions. It's kind of pure in that sense. A feeling."

"I'm going to ride this horse for the rest of my life. Simple as that. There is no other way. I love riding again. Probably for the first time since Rainbow died."

In *His Dark Materials* (2002), Philip Pullman writes a fictional account of Lyra Belacqua, and her daemon, Pantalaimon. In Lyra's world, our souls exist outside of our bodies as daemons, in various animal shapes. During Lyra's childhood, Pan takes many different forms, depending on her mood and state of mind. As a child approaches adolescence, each child's soul becomes fixed into a particular animal. Even when in fixed form, the daemon still signals the human's emotions and thoughts, becoming agitated when they are agitated, calm and happy when their humans are calm and happy.

In our world, I think, a narrative may be woven where a very similar process happens. During childhood, our souls are not visible as Pullman's souls are, but they are nevertheless there, and they mirror our internal states. During the right of passage of adolescence, something remarkable happens to the protagonists in this research narrative: they discover the external representations of their souls – the horses in their lives. From there on, human girl and horse daemon are inseparable, and, as in Pullman's world, they mirror one another perfectly. In both worlds, the relationship between human and soul is close, but fraught with difficulty and challenges, the greatest of which being a separation between girl and soul. I believe that we are very privileged to have these external representations of our soul, our horses.

BEING AN ADOLESCENT...

Adolescence: A Stage of Differences

A theme that emerged from our discussions about adolescence as a process, was that all co-participants viewed adolescence as being not one homogenous phase, but many different

phases mixed into one description. The teenagers consistently reflected that there were different parts to this whole transition, the liminality of being in the middle. These were often reflected to them in the content of what was present in their lives at the time.

“It’s a lot of school work...at least I’m not very involved with boys right now...so, it hasn’t bothered me that much in my life yet.”

I found this distinction quite interesting. According to this co-researcher, Janine, there are different phases of adolescence, reflected in what was present in her life at the time. Some content, such as school work, was deemed difficult but not insurmountable. But there seemed to be general agreement that once boys entered the picture, later in adolescence, matters became altogether more complicated.

A variation on this description is that even though adolescence is seen by society as one mass grouping of experience for all, this was not how the girls experienced it. Although common themes emerged, they agreed that to be a teenager was inherently also to be different from one another. Each of them experienced this process of transition, letting-go and letting-come, in a different manner.

“There are some people that take it more seriously than others, obviously. I don’t think I am experiencing being a teenager as terribly as they sometimes make it out to be. There are a lot of things that change, but there hasn’t been such a huge change in my life overall, I’d say. But it’s still not easy.”

One co-researcher, Amber, felt specifically very strongly about this point, as illustrated in this short exchange:

Steph: So do you think every teenager experiences being a teenager differently?

Amber: They do, they have to. I hope so.

Steph: How come?

Amber: Otherwise everything is the same.

Amber’s statement brought out a fundamental tension that arose often within the discussions. On the one hand, the girls felt it important to be unique, to be different. Amber’s words puts absolute primacy to this, *otherwise everything is the same*. There is an inherent fear here in

homogeneity, in everything and everyone experiencing adolescence in a similar manner. Juxtaposed with this fear is the polar opposite: the fear of being different. Within the group setting, the girls all agreed that to be a little different was acceptable, but to be wildly different was just plain strange. They commented on peers that were considered ‘too’, different, and how they were seen as outcasts to the group. Being outcast, it seemed, was even more frightening than to be too much the same.

This brings to mind one of the basic tenets of the liminal stage (Turner, 1968). Within the phase of liminality, the *liminal personae* are all stripped of their identifiers of before, of their identifying baggage, and enter into the liminal phase almost as blank slates. Within this phase of transition, all the liminal persons are inherently different, but they are similar in their difference. As soon as they are too different in their difference, it places them in a space beyond the pale, so to speak. They fall outside the hierarchy.

Adolescent Skills

Compromise

What became quite prominent was that the girls felt that horses had taught them a lot about compromise, which is one of the important skills that adolescents have to learn in the transition from childhood to young adulthood. Specifically, these compromise skills came into place in two domains of their lives. First, they had to learn to find a compromise between friends/boyfriends, and their horses. They admitted that there were times when that compromise was uneasy, but that they felt that their bond with their horses also taught them how to manage that. There are times where we pay more attention to different aspects of our lives, such as friends and relationships. When this happened, the girls felt it was very important that there was a strong bond between them and their horses, so that both parties knew they would always return to one another, that their relationship was always the firm foundation from which to explore other realms of life.

This sounds very similar to Bowlby and Ainsworth’s (Corey, 2005) theories of secure attachment, where an infant can securely explore their world, so long as they are aware of a firm foundation in a secure attachment to a primary caregiver. The horses in a sense provide

this secure attachment, from which different spheres in their lives can be examined safely, such as friends, boys, and the skill of compromise.

The second sphere where the girls felt that compromise was very important was school, as they had to learn from an early age to balance horse-riding, which is a time consuming sport, and very important to them, with school work, which they also viewed as one of the most important elements in their lives. Both horses and school had to receive adequate attention, and therefore they had to learn how to compromise between the two, but also to compromise on other aspects of their lives, such as socialising, in favour of seeing their horses more frequently.

School Work

Complimentary to this, the girls also felt that their horses not only made them better at compromise with school work, but also made them better at their school work per se.

“Spirit knows all about Hitler. So then I would sit on Spirit’s back, say now we go on an outride, and I would memorise it, in my head, so it feels like it’s going from me, into my horse, and then back, and it feels like I understand it better.”

However, there were also co-researchers who felt the opposite, that school work was meant to be left at home, and not carried over into the horse riding space. Yet they all felt that the horses, although often receiving priority in time and enjoyment over school, were the ones that helped them do better at school and perform better academically.

Being with Others/Being Alone

The tension between being alone and being with others was a difficulty that arose in the co-researchers’ relationships with horses. Some co-researchers felt that their horses needed their alone time, and that they as people also needed their alone time. Yet, they often felt rejected when their horses chose to not be with them.

“Sometimes I walk past him, and he’ll say hello for a while, and then he’ll walk off. Then I’ll feel I’m not important.”

This tension plays out between the horses and their people, but also in other spheres of life. One of these was in relationships, where one co-researcher felt that her horses had taught her the importance of allowing your partner her or his alone time, and being able to take your own alone time too. Another felt that in general, alone time was very important to teenagers in transition, time to get away from the noise and frustrations of the world and retreat inwards.

This seems to be another skill that the horses and girls learn together in the horse space, but which becomes important in the space beyond the horses. It's almost as if the horses provide a safe space from which to practice these new skills being learned, in a space of acceptance and unconditional positive regard, and then to use them in the world outside more securely. Again, this reminds me very powerfully of the psychotherapeutic space, where often therapists and clients learn through interaction in the therapeutic relationship, and then are later able to behave in new and more adaptive ways in the world outside of that healing space.

The Future

Another of the difficult tasks of adolescence is seeking a way forward in life. The co-researchers constantly noted how they had to worry about homework, about marks, choosing subjects at school, worrying about getting into university, and planning a career. Alongside that came pressures of decisions about dating, when to date, when not to date, when to have sex, when not to have sex, when in the future all these things would impact on them in a greater or a lesser degree. They also had some future worries about their horses, whether their training was on point, whether they would do well at shows, how much they would have to do extra work to afford their horses' stabling.

"I'm worried. I'm scared."

This anxiety about the future weighed quite heavily on them, and often wasn't equally balanced by an excitement for the future. It struck me during the interviews that my co-researchers were quite mature in their planning and their future visions, and I wondered where horses had come into that. Had they learned from a young age to plan their times and their futures better, in order to be able to meet demands everywhere, to be able to maintain their relationships with their horses better? Some of them were already working, making

extra money to contribute to their lessons and their stabling, and although these were remarkable steps to maturity, I worried that the horses also took a heavy toll on their hearts. Reflecting on my own experiences, I wondered how precarious the balance was between the benefits of having a horse, and the difficulties associated with it.

"I worry a lot about money with Tinkerbelle, because we have to pay his stabling. I also worry about Admiral, and about Africa because he got sore, I'm really sad."

However, and all the co-researchers agreed on this, the relationship with their special horse was one of the most important elements in their lives.

"Sometimes they help me escape the pressure..."

"It's my own world, where everything is perfect. And I'm doing great at school, and nothing is worrying, for that time on the farm. And also, it's amazing to see how my horse, from the one lesson to the next, learns something from that short little period, then it gives me something to concentrate on."

"Yeah, we think about all these things that we worry about, and I think, if we didn't have horses in our lives, it would have been different, it would have been a bit harder."

"If I haven't been to my horses in a while, I go insane. My mom says I get so depressed. I don't think I could have survived without my horses."

Instability

"This year didn't start so great, it's a bit better now, but the first few weeks of school really wasn't nice. I was down in the dumps, I really wasn't myself, my mom was asking what's wrong all the time. And I think it's because I'm not really with my friends anymore, we're in different classes. Last year we did everything together. I feel quite alone, but what can you do, so I'll have to live with it."

Adolescence is experienced as a time when there's very little stability. In the environment, things are constantly changing: school changes, classes change every year, friends change, friends are left behind and new ones are made. The same is present inside, the self is constantly in a state of flux.

This again raises the question as to the phase(s) of adolescence. As mentioned earlier, adolescence is not one neat phase in which a few tasks are negotiated, ticked off, and moved on from. Adolescence is multi-faceted, and experienced as constantly changing. Within this constant change, I have often wondered whether there is some uniformity of experience across groups, similar phases which are passed through. For example, anecdotally, it's often said that the early parts of being a teenager, aren't as tumultuous as the later years of adolescence. What are the different processes taking place that distinguish these times from one another?

On a content level, we can see that movements in school probably play a large part in these phases. In early high school, new arrivals are often more shielded, they don't have as many classes, they often go to different classes together. Often, they retain their childhood friends. In that melting pot of change, more and more challenges arise. Classes and choices of subject change, friends move on to new friends, the school makes more demands on pupils' time, challenges such as peer pressure, drugs, dating, and sex start appearing on the horizon. It seems that adolescence certainly intensifies and complexifies as it passes through its phases. This would be an interesting place to research in future, if one were careful not to rigidify processes into a narrow mould, but rather study them a-temporally, with provision for difference. I think difference will likely be the cornerstone of any 'ology' that was written about adolescence, in any case. Hopefully this difference will act as a guard against any rigidity.

Friends

"Friends have a huge impact on your life."

As adolescence becomes more complicated, so too do friendship and relationship arrangements.

"I don't rely on anyone else. I don't need backup. I rely on myself."

"My mom trusts me with boys, my dad not so much yet. I have more trust in my mom, like, I've got this friend, if I've gone out with him, I'll tell her everything. But if I tell my dad, he'll pretend like he doesn't care, but he does. He doesn't like to see me grow up."

"It's true, you might like a guy a lot, you might want to dress up and that's exactly where you'll make the mistake, because he'll think he can get away with anything. So then he'll actually start manipulating you, so you have to from the beginning, the guy must accept you for who you are."

"The problem is, once you're shared that (sex) with him, in my mind, you become one. Because that guy took something from you and he gave you something back. So...you don't get attached, you get deeper, more emotional, about this relationship. So if they decide to leave you, you're going to take it harder than a normal relationship."

"I try my best, but there's nothing I can really do to help my friend. The thing is with her...she seems happy, people will think she's fine. But this year she is better. She doesn't cut herself anymore. But she's still very depressed, and her mother won't help her."

In the early stages of adolescence, it seems that the young teens enter into a simpler time. Childhood still clings, friendships are simpler, boys and dating are still things of the future. The more complicated things of adulthood are only stories read in books, things that happen to other people.

But as childhood fades further, new challenges arise. The challenges mentioned by the girls, in just the above extracts, include the positive and negative impacts of friendships, trust between adolescent and parent, sex, depression, cutting, to name a few. It seems that with the entrance of new friends and new spaces, new complications arise.

These complications range from new experiences which are enjoyable, having close friends, the excitement of dating, and other new experiences. But something which also became quite clear was that the girls were very invested in their friends, and their friends' difficulties impacted them deeply. When a friend is in crisis, it's almost as if you personally are also in crisis. Each of these crises, in turn, teach you something new, whether it be about depression or how to support a friend in difficult times. These links of adolescence seem to be especially intense, and its within this intensity that a huge amount of individuation and learning takes place.

Adolescence, in this sense, reminds me of an alchemical process. In attempts to transmute materials from *nigredo* (black) to *rubedo* (red), and thus from a less refined (less

individuated) to a more refined (further individuated) form, the materials are placed in containers which are surrounded by different materials, and exposed to differing degrees of heat and cold (Cesarotti, 2011). During this transmutating process, there are times where intense heat is appropriate, but other times where it is not. Similarly, adolescence is one phase of the transmutation process of individuation. In adolescence, by the nature of the change, intense heat is applied by the holding environment. Intense heat implies intense discomfort, but also radical and sometimes unpredictable change. These radical changes are reflected clearly in adolescence, and very clearly so in the mirroring of friendships, which become more intense and complex as the years of adolescence pass.

Finding an Authentic Voice

“As a woman who loves herself in the mind
I know I deserve everything
And I should get it.
As a girl who hates herself in the body
I know I deserve nothing
And I should get it.”

This tension between self-hate and self-love was captured by a teenager participating in a study cited in Mary Piper’s 1994 book, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. One of the co-researchers tells of a similar dilemma with her horse:

“I’m so hard on myself. For example, if we’re cantering, then we’ll get something right, but the circle will be too small, then I’ll just notice the circle is too small, not that we’re doing something else right. Everything isn’t perfect.”

Our horses become extensions of ourselves, and a perceived failure with your horse is a perceived failure of yourself. Even more, we feel guilt about doing something wrong with our horse, whom we’re constantly trying to please and do better for. Reflected in both the journey of adolescence, and the collective Western mind is an unceasing pressure to be perfect. This desire to achieve the perfect body, perfect hair, perfect horse, perfect *everything* comes to a boil during adolescence, when we are in constant flux but also under constant scrutiny.

During an interview, this struggle emerged as a metaphor of two voices:

“So in fact there are two voices. The one voice is your own, and other belongs to all the other people who are telling you what to do.”

“It’s like ten against one. I’m the one, they’re the ten. I try to fight them, but they fight back. I really want to listen to my own voice, but it’s easier said than done.”

Kohanov (2007, p. 26) refers to this voice of the collective other as the False Self, which is “little more than a collection of habits that coalesce to form a rigid identity, it has no creativity, no intuition, no ability to experiment, and very little connection to the body and its feelings.” This false self, or ten-to-one voice of the collective other, is inherently incongruent. It wears the mask of perfection, of control, of achievement. But it covers what we feel inside: fear, disappointment, shame, desperation, anger, grief. To make matters more difficult, when our true voices speak up authentically and congruently, they are often stifled and frightened by the ten other voices screaming back that we should try harder, be prettier, conform, stop complaining, stop – for heaven’s sake above all – talking about your own voice!

It’s a task and a challenge that must be confronted during adolescence. It’s often called identity formation in mainstream psychology literature (Erikson, 1968). Erikson (1968) felt that there are four main tasks to complete during this important psychosocial task of adolescence: becoming and feeling comfortable with a central feeling of self, having a sense of direction in life, perceiving continuity between past, present and future self, and being confirmed in identity expression by a community of important others.

But there is an inherent paradox in this: become yourself, but only insofar as this ‘self’ is congruent with what is expected from someone in your position. When those ten voices start screaming that your ‘self’, isn’t good enough, it’s a very difficult challenge to engage your true self above the false self. The true self is punished, more often than not. The false self is rewarded. The false self rejects paradox, as it is inherently difficult and confusing, in favour of incongruence.

Society rewards our efforts to conform and be good citizens. Horses do not. Horses reward only one thing above all: authenticity and congruence, attributes of the true self, and a vital link to the transcendent functions of the soul. Within a world where a teenage rite of passage

is inherently paradoxical, horses can sit with the paradox, and create spaces where the self can emerge.

"I think the horses, this farm, it's sort of my reality check. At the horses I'm totally different, at the horses it's a different world. Once you go back out the gate, it's a different world, but here I can be myself, I don't care if my hair looks terrible, I don't care if my pants are dirty. I can be myself. This is my time."

Adolescents as Liminal Personae

"People are very narrow-minded. They don't accept difference, that's one thing I've noticed. So if you are different, or you think differently, or dress differently or whatever."

"To be outside the norm, you're seen as weird. People don't talk to you, you have to stay inside the norm. At school, the middle is where the popular people are, even if you're just a little bit outside that, people will think you're weird, they'll talk about you. And it's usually silly things that make you different, small things."

A central theme reflected from the co-researchers was that horsey girls are often different. They're seen as somehow different by others, from one perspective. But these co-researchers also somehow self-identified as different, not quite within the norm. Whether this was due to their link with horses, or other characteristics that made them different isn't clear, but what is clear is that from these discussions and explorations, is that these co-participants felt their difference, and also the danger that this difference entails. Within the frame of adolescent development, this constitutes a significant challenge. One of the main goals of adolescence is said to be identity development, and the task of differentiating oneself from the more homogenous identity of childhood. Within this journey of individuation, then, is a challenge, and a tension. On the one hand, to become oneself, to become an individuated being on her own journey, but, being constantly challenged within that process to not be 'too' different, or 'too' distinctly individuated from those around you.

Some co-researchers responded to this by rebelling and being very reactively different, others responded by trying their best to fit into the norm, to fall into the middle of the bell curve.

"You have to watch yourself in my school. If you walk just a little outside the norm, you don't have friends."

"Punishment for being different."

"Being a teenager in this generation is really, really hard."

This difference was however not felt at the riding yard, where each girl felt like she could be herself within the group, and not be punished for this difference. Again, the healing space becomes a neutral zone, a place where the *liminal personae* can belong to a group in which they feel as if they are hierarchically not challenged. Their difference doesn't make them the outsider even to this select group of girls who are already in a strange, different, transitional space. Their difference was also accepted by their horses, who did not judge them for being outside the norm, and for not conforming to outside pressures. Indeed, the opposite seems to be the case. Horses, with their keen eye and feel for incongruence, struggle to relate to humans when they're trying to put up a façade, and react in distressed or disorganised ways. Only once the human becomes congruent, herself, with the horse, is she rewarded for being herself with a deeper and more enjoyable relationship with the horse. It seems then, that the horse holds a unique place in the journey of individuation for these co-researchers. This unique place is perhaps the only place where they are not only accepted, warts and all, but where they are directly and swiftly rewarded through the relationship for doing so.

This is something that I have, and still do, experience in my own individuation journey also.

"I am not fit to exist in human society. I should just stick to writing and riding."

Although I did not realise it when I wrote these words, some years ago, these words connect me to each of these co-participants, and guided my way into this research. Those two spaces that I felt provided neutral, safe ground for my difference: writing and riding. Sometimes, I still have the same feelings, especially in times of personal upheaval, when I feel again as if I am living on the limen and do not belong. This research process has also awoken these wounds in me again, reminding me of my difference, and my becoming, and how the two are always interwoven.

"But there's something about us that makes us different. And I feel like it's that something different that connects us to the horse in some way. That makes the horses

more important to us than just a sport. More important than just a hobby. Like they're part of our souls."

In addition, importance of friends in this phase could not be overstated by most co-researchers.

"You see, there are three groups of people. There are people I just greet, people that I'll have a chat with, and my friends. So the people I'll have a chat to I'll just talk a little bit, but no personal things or anything."

Each co-researcher spoke of a friend or two that they shared everything with, that they felt were their closest confidantes:

"As soon as my friend is there and I can share my problems with her, they don't feel so bad anymore."

Some of these friends understood the horsey part of their lives, but none of their best friends were horse girls themselves. These were friends who stood by them in good times and bad, who were sympathetic, and who did not judge them for how they felt or what they did. Their friends were also from very similar social strata to them, with similar interests and outlooks on life.

These friends form part of the body of liminal persons who experience adolescence together. They have been stripped of childhood, but have not yet achieved adulthood, they are neither here nor there. In that, they share the characteristics of *liminal personae*, being in a place where rules and even expectations are unclear, in a space that is more "slushy" than concrete (Maynard Nicol, 2001). Maynard Nicol (2001, p. iii) acknowledges that adolescence is a time of great personal transformation, and that central to this process is "the importance of supportive relationships during this time of uncertainty."

"I think people react to you differently. My one friend, you can talk to her, and she'll get it, but she won't give you sympathy. She'll change the subject. My other friend will give me sympathy. I guess I do the same with other people. This other girl, when I talked to her about my hair, she just started talking about her own hair. It's a very small thing to other people, but a very big thing to me."

Friends are important, but Sax (2010) emphasises that girls also need a community. Within this community, the difficulties of adolescence, as well as the pleasures of adolescence are discussed, exposed, and held respectfully. He suggests that this community may not necessarily be at its most healthy when it contains only peers of the same age and background. In these groups, girls can sometimes fall into co-rumination, he suggests, where negative patterns are reinforced and focussed on, to the exclusion of positive aspects, and transformation. A true community may include girls from the same age, but possibly also older women, who are available to facilitate and challenge appropriately when patterns with adolescent girls become stuck. Sax (2010, p. 205) feels that a true community must be one that “bridges the generations”. This reminds me of a statement one of the girls mothers made to me: It takes a whole village to raise a child.

Upon reflection, I wonder whether the farm space hasn’t allowed for this community building in a very subtle way. Without realising it, as we grew closer to one another through our horses, we were bridging a multi-generational community, which is permeable and flexible. At times, it includes girls ranging from eight, to a whole group of teenagers, to a number of young adults, to parents and instructors. These groups change and adapt, but became, with the exclusion of one or two who chose not to participate in the research, the group which the research was conducted. They were the four participants and myself. The girls are all separated by one year, being 15, 16 and two 17 year olds. I am ten years their senior. In our discussions, especially when everyone was together, there was a sense of shared space, but also difference. One co-researcher, who was more familiar with dating and boys, often shared her feelings regarding the space. I sometimes commented on my experiences during those times, and how I see the struggles they are sitting with now. Each co-researcher brought her own unique voice to a community of young women, and together these voices tolerated both similarity and difference.

Learning to be vulnerable: intimacy, belonging and mortality

I mention to the girls that I met a girl during my training who became seriously mentally ill after her horse died. I tell them a few brief details, because it touched me quite personally. I remember saying, as a teenager:

“If my horse ever dies, I will go crazy. I don’t want to live without her.”

The girls react very powerfully to this story:

"He will probably be my last horse. I'd be very sad when he's gone. I've thought about it before. It's just that I can't picture myself with another horse. I guess it's like marrying someone, if they die or something, I can't remarry."

"If my horse died I'd end up in a mental hospital."

I think and I wonder about that vacuum that the girl mentioned earlier. I think of the feeling of vacuum I felt when my horse died. I think of the fears that these girls have, such real fears. The sadness is that we do live longer than our horses. Often, our horses come into our lives during these pivotal years of transition, during adolescence, when that vacuum screams most powerfully. Existentially, I think we all become aware of that space, that emptiness inside of us, during adolescence. It's when we first ask the question, does life have any meaning (Frankl, 1946; Frankl, 1978)? Our horses step into that vacuum with all four feet. Again, I'm torn in my appreciation for this. On the one hand, I am thankful, incredibly thankful, for these wise and patient beings who are willing to bear our bodies and our burdens, who walk carefully yet powerfully into the darkness with us, who face our shadows with us. On the other, having spent many years grieving the death of my first horse, I wonder whether, instead of using the space to become, I used the space as a hitching post. It's very easy to become subsumed in our horses: *he is me*. And yet we are two different beings, circularly connected and together in a journey of transition and transcendence, but nonetheless beings who will one day have to continue the next phase of our journeys alone.

"You lose everything when you lose your horse. I just know it's important to have a horse as a teenager. Because it's hard, it's a hard time being a teenager. I don't know what I would do without my horse."

Perhaps there is a third option, in that the horses teach us even this: to deal not only with the wonder and the grace of being allowed in their presence, but also to learn about utter sadness, desperation, and loss. Maybe our horses' final gift to us is that we learn how to deal with grief, whether we lose them to circumstances or time. Again, they provide a safe launching pad from which to learn these emotions, contained within their magic, which lingers even after they are gone. To this day, I am thankful for the things that my horse, the only horse I've ever lost to death, taught me. To this day, I fear as these girls do, losing my two horses

whom I love more than my own skin today. They certainly teach us to love what death can touch.

"It doesn't feel like I give them enough love for what they do for me."

Changes and Rites of Passage (The 'Bam!' Moment)

"Yes, and when I think back to before that, I remember I was feeling kind of lost. I was in a rut, I suppose. Day to day everything is going pretty much the same. And then, bam!"

That 'bam!' moment is one mentioned by other co-researchers as well. One spoke of knowing that change needed to come, even though it was uncomfortable. I remember being in a similar rut, a rut where everything is boring, normal, predictable. I wonder whether this is one of those experiences that mark adolescence? Maybe one of those nodal points that mark a jump, from a simpler, more child-like existence, to a more complicated, more rich finely differentiated existence?

"A big thing I pick up from this. After Rainbow, the tone of everything changes. I sound more grown up in my writing. I even use bigger words. I write like a grown-up, no longer like a child. Was that death my rite of passage?"

I think the content of the 'bam!' moment is important, but not as important as the moment itself. Something I draw from the comments of the co-researchers, and my own old writing, is that there comes a moment, one that can often be clearly traced back, where everything changes. In this moment, we are confronted with everything we thought we knew about ourselves and the world around us. The received wisdom doesn't necessarily hold, compared to the new experiences that are shaping us, painfully and violently. Often, the moment isn't only one experience, but a build-up of a number of events or emotions over time, and yet one can always remember that moment that you stood at the cusp, where everything changed. In a sense, I wonder whether that moment isn't the moment where the invisible line between childhood and young adult is being drawn. That place where everything changes.

Arnold van Gennep (1960, p. 2-3) points out this moment clearly: "The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one stage to another and from one occupation to

another.” Maynard Nicol (2001) asks, if we are constantly moving from one stage to another in our lives, what of the in-between? Is it possible to see and experience the space between the ending of an old space and the birth of a new one? Is it possible to map the experience inside the cocoon, before the worm becomes the butterfly? I think that this ‘bam!’ experience is one of those experiences inside the cocoon that mark the movement from child, through the adolescent transition, into young adulthood.

In Victor Turner’s (1967) model of this transition, three states are marked: separation, limen, and aggregation. The separation phase is the phase where the individual detaches from an earlier phase in their belonging in society. For the co-researchers, separation would be the time of childhood still lingering, before that moment where they symbolically detach from the signifiers of childhood. The limen, or margin phase is the in-between, the cocoon, the very transition we have been exploring during this research journey. Aggregation is the third phase, where the individual becomes part of a new role or state in society, with again clearly defined rights and roles. Turner (1967, p. 94) calls this a “process, a becoming, ...even a transformation.”

There are some consistencies between Turner (1967) and van Gennep’s (1960) understanding of the transitional phases in society, and the process of individuation as we have discussed in preceding sections. In the transitional models, we move from what is known, through a stage of flux, where everything is ‘slushy’, as Maynard Nicols (2001) coined the phrase, to a new phase of belonging within a new place in society. These transitions are often marked by rites of passage, be they incidental or highly symbolic and institutionalised. In individuation, we move from a state of homogeneity with our surrounding environment, to individuating into a more independent being, one that is individuated, different, from the original starting point (Stein, 2005). During this individuation, we move through phases of testing different personas, encountering them archetypally, through images, dreams and other incidental processes, finally defining a self that is an authentic, true reflection of our inner existence (Jung-Kee, 2007). Turner and van Gennep describe processes which are reflected often externally, they map what is happening in the world outside. Jung’s mapping of individuation is a deeply and intensely internal experience.

“I prefer it that way. I could stay longer on the farm. And a lot of people would say I should stay longer and ride all the other horses, those ones who are going to get me

killed. But I don't want to. And I'm not going to. I don't want any negative associations with this place or with riding or any of that."

Here, Megan puts her foot down very firmly. Before, she might have given in to the expectations of those around her, to stay on the farm longer, to ride more horses, even though she only wanted to spend time with her own horse. Now, she is in a place where she is able to understand the expectations of the group, the pull towards belonging which would have had her riding more horses, even though she only wanted to spend time with Luna. She chose consciously here, to follow the pull within herself towards becoming, and only do what she knew was right for her. The use of the phrase "*a lot of people would say*" indicates that she is very aware of this pull in one direction, and the forceful languaging of "*And I'm not going to*" shows a very clear choice to deviate from the collective expectations. The isn't unaware of the tension created by these two, either. Yet, in this moment, she chooses to listen to her own authentic voice.

I see parallels in both the internal and external journeys of becoming of myself and the co-researchers. Yet, I'm also aware of the paradox which arises again: we individuate, we become our authentic selves, yet we do so within a context. This context may be supportive, but this context may also be impartial to our rites of passage, or in fact destructive to our becoming our authentic selves. There is a constant pull and push between becoming and belonging. This is a push and pull which emerges from the words of my co-researchers often. That 'bam!', which marks a powerful movement between belonging and becoming, becoming and belonging, is a painful and frightening experience. It's scary to realise you no longer belong where you once were, what was once constant is now shaky, what was once stable is now slushy. Yet, there's also an aspect of excitement, we discover new roads to travel, we *like* the sound of our own voice above all others, we see new colours, taste new tastes, we sample a fresh world never known before. It's fun, trying on the jackets of becoming. One thing is certain, in this shifting of the tides: everything changes for the adolescent, and this irreversible process holds equal measures of fear and excitement. In this ceaseless flux is an element of liminality. But in this in-betweenity, I sense that it is important to have a holding space. There must be frame to hold all these apocalyptic earthquakes of change.

This is a difficult space to invoke. Most do not have access to this supportive frame, and although our processes never stop or end, they can become disjointed, misguided, when we

start to confuse the map for the territory. As with the necessity of a rite of passage to mark transition, we need a container too, for the transitional processes. To these co-researchers, I sense that the horses have become the holding space. Yet I wonder and I worry, who are will be present in the transitional phases of other adolescents? What holds the transitional phases, if we do not have access to such marvellous bridges as horses? In terms of therapy, I think this is absolutely central to all therapeutic processes, but especially so in the liminal phase of adolescence. This again affirms the valuable place of horses in the space of therapy and becoming, these animals who hold us unbidden, who facilitate our processes instinctively, who bridge the spaces with grace and elegance.

Letting go of Outcomes

Something our horses taught us all was to let go of outcomes. Every co-researcher had a story where they came to riding with the expectations to ride and have a great time, and walked away miserable. Conversely, we all have stories where we came to riding expecting to struggle, and had one of the most marvellous days of our lives. We've all competed, and at competitions this lesson is taught with even greater intensity. The heavier you lay your expectations on that one class you want to win, or that one jump you need to make, the more your horse teaches you a swift lesson in letting go of that expectation. When you walk into a class and abandon all need to win, all need to impress those watching, all need at all...and just *ride*, that's usually when things go well in the show ring. From very early on, our horses teach us to deal with disappointment, and enjoy what we get when we get it.

In a sense, working with horses goes beyond that. Yes, we learn to ride for the moment, and let go of preconceived expectations of a day or performance. But beyond that, they teach us to step into the flow of life. Stepping into the flow, immediately we step into the present. Above all, horses teach us presencing. Within being present, we bring the lessons from before, as well as the intention for something in the future, but we learn to be in the moment and just *ride*. Becoming present in such a powerful manner brings us closer to what Ingrid Soren (2001) calls the Zen of horse-riding.

"Above all, let go!", Soren (2001, p. 21) captures the phrase that has caused much consternation in many a rider. How can you try so hard, and still let go? This paradox is captured in the feeling of presencing with the horse, where effort becomes effortless, where

work flows, and where you and the horse become so connected that there is no more thinking, only doing and being together.

“When I’m here, I’m here. I don’t really think about it too much.”

Fuck this Shit in General (Disillusionment)

“Fuck this shit in general.”

These words capture two important elements of adolescence. Firstly, finding the courage to disregard the voices of others and to listen to themselves. This we’ve discussed in preceding sections. Secondly, it captures something every adolescent realises at some point during this transformation: the illusion of the world collapses, and they learn to be disgruntled and bitter with the world for perhaps the first time. Megan found this place to be something of a hitching post:

“I remember I was feeling kind of lost, in a rut. Day to day everything was going pretty much the same.”

I had times where I wrote about this too:

“Who am I fooling? I hate this place. I hate these people. On one hand, I love my life, on the other, I have this...feeling in me. This feeling of discontent. Unsettled.”

This disillusionment is painful, because we lose faith in the world around us, our illusions about what we thought was true for our present and our future. Robert Bly and Marion Woodman call this realisation The Great Disappointment (1998). During this time, one is often cast adrift, uncertain about anything that used to be safe, unwilling to make choices about the future. The meaning of life has taken a serious knock, existentially, this is the first time we ask: What is the meaning of this? Is there even meaning to life? Like a buoy at sea, we may dart and bob for a while, but we may dart and bob for a very long time. We may even get stuck in this nebulous place. This place is often called the dark night of the soul, and it is vital that adolescents have a space in which to negotiate this journey. If the space is not held, girls find empty ways of making meaning in life, challenging their disappointment into “an obsession with athletics, thinness, alcohol, cutting, and/or social networking. [...]”

But none of these obsessions will satisfy. It's like drinking water when you're hungry for food." (Sax, 2010, p. 190).

WE'RE FOR EACH OTHER...CONCLUDING CONTENT THEME

"We're for each other in this world."

"She keeps me alive. I credit everything good in me to her. She's the only one."

The first words belong to one of my co-researchers, the second words belong to me. Something so clear from our discussions and explorations is that although we love horses, there is that one particular horse, or two, that are our souls. They're our everything, they're our daemons. Most girls get the opportunity to ride a number of horses before they are allowed to half-bait or own a horse.

I remember everything in my entire life changing, the day I met Rainbow. From that moment on, I was hers and she was mine, even though it was to be another year before I could say that she was mine on paper. As a thirteen year old girl, my life suddenly orbited around only one thing, and that was Rainbow. When I was sick, I pretended to be alright so that I could ride my horse. When we had financial difficulties, I learned to teach lessons and rode other horses to make money. When I did poorly at school, the threat of losing my soulmate kept it from becoming a trend. It kept me from losing myself to the bad influences around me, which offered themselves with easy availability. I believe that Rainbow kept me sane during that time, she gave me a reason for being.

Megan tells of the fact that she loved the horses that came before Luna, but Luna changed her forever. Such that she can never imagine riding another horse after him. Amber says of the first time she sat on her pony, Tinkerbelle: *"It was the best day of my life."* She works long and hard hours on Saturdays and sometimes even Sundays, and school holidays, to be able to contribute towards her pony's stabling. For all practical purposes, the pony could be sold. He doesn't compete in shows, and she is becoming tall for him, but none of this matters to her. He is her soulmate, and she will do anything, even at the expense of herself, to keep him. Lexi calls her pony Gibson her father, and, even though she is too tall to ride him, will never allow him to be sold. Her horse, Spirit, is an ex-racehorse with terrible back problems,

but she continues patiently with him, and loves him in spite of the fact that he will never compete at big shows or bring her many ribbons. Janine rides her horse, Tokyo, in rain and shine, whether she's sick or tired, regardless, she will ride, and she is often found on quiet moments on the farm when everyone else has long gone home.

The point of these stories is that between horse and rider, a very special tie binds them together. I believe that we don't choose our horses, any more than our horses choose us. We choose each other, and we proceed to change each other's lives. Often, we end up in a relationship with a horse that brings out exactly our greatest difficulties. My horses are all hot and fizzy, nervous horses, a challenge I struggle with often, being anxious and ungrounded myself in difficult times. Janine and her horse are both hard workers, to a fault. They often get caught in a cycle of perfectionism which serves neither of them, and have to challenge themselves to learn to let go and let flow. Amber is often very absent minded and on a different planet, which mirrors her pony exactly. Both of them have to shake themselves sometimes just to come back to reality. Somehow, we find the horse that connects to us on the deepest level, who brings out our best, and challenges us at our worst.

I remember once going to a EAP demonstration during an emotionally fragile time in my life. I was feeling deeply wounded due to the loss of a horse, and almost resentful about being between a group of horses that reminded me of my own loss. During the demonstration, we were asked to walk around in an enclosure with a number of horses, and just stand with the horse that we felt drawn to. The horses must have felt my discomfort, because they let me be, until one unremarkable bay horse just stood with me. He didn't allow me to touch him or groom him, only insisted that I stand by his head. While standing by his head, he breathed sweet horse medicine all over me, and I felt the wounds that I had held so tightly bound release, finding myself crying quietly by this horse I barely knew. I marvelled at the insight and compassion of this creature, who showed me such kindness even when I was holding the horse world at bay for my own protection.

Many EAP programmes make this horse selection phase an integral part of their therapeutic process, and I agree wholeheartedly with the practice. As demonstrated by so many practical examples by my co-researchers and myself, the horse and the human choose one another for a very important purpose. We work on each other, we heal one another.

4.3. WORKING WITH PROCESS THEMES

“There *is* something magical about it, sure,
but it’s the magic of an undiscovered tongue.”

(Roberts, 1997, p. 5)

Facilitating Space for Equine/Human Closeness

An unexpected side effect of the research exploration was that co-researchers felt that the act of talking about the horses and all their experiences really made them feel closer to their horses.

“Yeah, because you talk about it and you really appreciate them. I dunno, like when you talk about it, you think about it, and you value them.”

“Speaking about it really brought you closer to the horse.”

This had not been one of the intended outcomes of the research. However, I found it rewarding to know that this pace wasn’t a space only of content exploration, but that there was value beyond that for the co-researchers. To me, this made the research process more enriching too, because I knew that the work being done wasn’t only intellectual, but that there were real life consequences in the co-researchers’ lives, my own included.

This made me think further than only the current project, but also about what role this space filled where there had previously been a vacuum. As mentioned in the content themes, it seems to be really difficult for those who are close with horses to find a space where this closeness is truly accepted and appreciated. There most likely was never a space to discuss these feelings and effects that horses had on them, to explore and mine beneath the superficial experiences. Perhaps, the tacit knowing from the learning with horses was also under-valued in their everyday lives, and this space provided them with a place of affirmation that there truly was value in these intense relationships.

Beyond this, I then questioned whether ethically, I really stood in a position to close this space comfortably once the research had been completed. If we were truly co-researchers and co-creators of this process, did it not then mean that we should consult with one another about the closing process? Do we close at all, or do we continue in the space that was opened, exploring further and more deeply, well beyond the walls of the research project?

Equine Facilitated Interviewing

When deciding on the venue of our interviews, I consciously made the choice to interview on the farm where the girls ride their horses, and to place us quite centrally so that most of the horses were in view as we worked. I did this because, instinctively, it just felt right. My intuition told me that we had to go into the space where most of the magic happened, in order to be closer to that field. Having done this, I decided to keep a careful eye on the horses, my non-verbal co-interviewers and co-facilitators in this exploration. They chosen to do their task with abandon, and I was continuously excited to see their participation in the process. I felt that they were in agreement, and that they had given permission, that they truly were facilitating and monitoring the process, prompting the only half-joking term: Equine Facilitated Interviewing (EFI).

During the initial group interview, we were busy for a very long time, and topics kept emerging that required further and further exploration. Both the girls and myself were so caught up in the process, we didn't even realise how time flew by, and two hours flew by without our notice. Just prior to the two hour mark, the horse in the camp right beside our interview area stood quietly watching us for a few minutes, before deciding to make his own comment on the process and taking an almighty roll right beside us, rolling, grunting and kicking up dirt. Everyone was interrupted and distracted, and we looked up. I realised at that time that we had been going for too long, and although we were all still very interested, we were talking in circles, having taken the exploration as far as it could have gone that day. It was not the only time this happened. During my individual interviews, a horse nearby often decided to roll after about an hour to talking, as of to say, whoa, Rome wasn't built in a day. This happened so often that one of the co-researchers even commented, saying that we were clearly done for that day.

Another interesting effect between the horses and ourselves was when they clearly felt the energy of an exciting or taboo topic jumping between us. During one of the group interviews, our discussions had gone into an uncomfortable topic, which was how horse-riding girls were sometimes seen as more sexual than other girls. The co-researchers were quite uncomfortable with the subject matter, but also uncomfortable with the labels that they had sometimes unwittingly gained:

"I was sitting in class once, and there were boys behind me. They asked me are you a horse rider, and I said yes. They then giggled by themselves, and I just knew that they had said something filthy about me."

This story was told with distaste and embarrassment, and it wasn't the only story of its kind. We discussed this for quite while, and after twenty minutes or so, we were surprised by the horses, who were in about four different fields all around us, when they all stated becoming very agitated and running around in fields, heads held high, tails high, kicking their heels up and snorting. I wondered at the time what the field effect had been on the horses, whether they had felt the discomfort and distaste in the air around us, and had mirrored that through their own excitement. The air had been so thick that it might have sparked, and the horses manifested that spark in their behaviour.

Difficulties with Language

Something we stumbled onto quite often was how difficult it was to actually verbalise what we felt for our horses. It wasn't easy to explain the link we felt to our horses, and it certainly wasn't easy to describe the nexus between adolescence and equus callabus.

"It's like a different kind of happy. Like a Happy Happy. It can't be described."

Apart from our difficulties explaining our feelings for our horses, these are exactly the difficulties I've encountered time upon time with the literature, and the horse community at large, from competition to therapy. Most often, I found people very able to communicate to me the measurable value of interactions with horses in a therapeutic space (Birke, Hockenhull & Creighton, 2010; Helmer, 1991; Yorke, Adams & Coady, 2008). These are not being

called into doubt, but I am frustrated with the depth of exploration in the field of horses and healing. I often felt doubt even in myself, why not rather just list the benefits of EAP and be done with it? But I felt as if I wasn't being true to the wound, the question that had called me to this project: what is it between a girl and her horse? What is the magic between a girl and her horse?

There is a definite gap here, the place of soul and archetype, of the deeper journey, which has not been felt and seen for all its wonder. During these discussions, I discovered some reasons for this seeming gap. First, it is simply very difficult to talk about, and therefore most often not talked about, in preference for subject matter that is more easily approachable.

Second, I felt hesitance in myself, and saw it in my co-researchers, to go to that space of thinking and feeling. I ascribed this to the language difficulties, but also to a certain way of thinking and feeling we have learned in our lives. Even more, we have learned that horses are animals and therefore less intelligent and less capable than ourselves. This notion of intelligence is based purely on intellectual knowing, and from that basis alone horses would seem to be less important in the spheres of knowledge production. If we were to turn this around, and base knowing, deep knowing, on intuition, on community mindedness, on social congruence and emotional insight, horses certainly have the upper-hand on humanity. It is therefore threatening to most western socialised minds to even consider this possibility as reasonable. We, too, have been socialised in this way. I think in a sense, this project took on that purpose in addition to the many others mentioned – a way of re-socialising ourselves, a challenge to ourselves to see if we could open our minds in ways we usually only hope to be able to do.

A third reason, I think, and a direct descendant of what I mentioned above, is the language and expectancies of mainstream academia. Largely, research is still rooted in paradigms that require objectivity, and with this requirement of objectivity comes expectations of reliability, validity, repeatability, certain language-ing. The paradigms dictate the scope within which results may be found. Once we write and explore outside of these paradigms of discovery, we often find ourselves uncomfortable, often reprimanded, at the very least looked at with a certain disdain for not doing 'scientific' enough research. In my mind, this is one of the great shortcomings of the social sciences at this point in time, this adherence to a-particular-outcome-or-nothing thinking. To fall outside the scope of what is acceptable, makes the work not legitimate. This in turn curtails what can be produced at all. Anything that is not

produced within the scope of acceptance, within the bell curve of normality or too many standard deviations beyond the norm, cannot possibly be knowing, discovery, worthy, and therefore must be censored from grassroots up.

Isomorphic Journeying

Prior to the interviews, I spent a long time immersed in literature. This period ranged widely, as notable from the preceding sections. I spent a long time with equine literature, ranging from quantitative studies to poetry to photo-essays and everything in between. I detoured into adolescence, which look me far and wide, from rites of passage and liminality, to Native American Medicine and spirituality, Jung, the mandala and individuation. During this time, I also developed an abiding passion for depth psychology, archetypal work, and individuation processes. This was mirrored by deeper and deeper readings into healing and shamanism.

The literature of course was a reflection of my own life processes at the time, many of which are still on-going. As I became more able to see my own journey, to map my own processes, I became aware of how my own individuation and differentiation, as a person, as a psychotherapist, as someone questioning everything I'd ever known and believed, linked and was interwoven in my research process and consequently my literature.

I realised as I began interacting with my co-researchers, both human and equine, that my process and theirs were very similar. We were in places in our lives where huge changes were taking place, where the center would no longer hold. Everything was changing, we were transitioning. The teenagers were negotiating the painful movement from child to young adult. I was busy negotiating my individuation as young adult, moving in a ever deepening process with psychotherapy, horse and healing. We were finding this part of our lives very difficult. Although the content we spoke about was vastly different, I constantly felt a deep resonance between the processes taking place:

Steph: I feel like I've had a similar experience to you, the beginning of this year.

Janine: I feel so alone.

Steph: I still feel quite alone, too. And you can't talk to the people you used to any more.

Janine: Yes, it's terrible. You make new friends, but old friends are amazing.

Steph: So this year was a huge change for you?

Janine: Yes, lots of change in my daily routine, my social life, everything. And I think it was necessary, it was necessary for a bit of change, the last two years have been very constant, everything was the same. Change is good, but it's no fun. It's difficult to live with.

Steph: You get to that point, right, you know it's necessary, but at the same time it hurts?

We both felt terribly alone at the beginning of 2014. Janine had moved classes, and was no longer able to see her old friends as frequently as before. I had moved from university to my internship placement, and felt a huge void in support. We were (are) both transitioning, and although we're moving through different phases, the feeling of being a *liminal personae* is very communal.

Complimentary to this, were the links between my own background with horses as a teenager, and their experiences. As we spoke of our joys with our horses, I felt their joys. As we spoke of sadness, I felt a tugging at that wound that had originally led to me to this exploration in the first place. This wound had been acknowledged silently, to myself, at that point. I chose to acknowledge this wound to them, too. I see these moments, where either I or the co-researchers acknowledged some wound or discomfort, as the nexus points of our interactions. These were the points where we could have remained superficial, or we could risk ourselves and go to the painful and the taboo. These were also the pivotal moments where our explorations became more than just story-exchange, but became story weaving, where we wove our stories together, provoking, holding, and healing one another in the process.

4.4. META-REFLECTIONS AND ETHICS

The Illusion of Objectivity

Upon initiating my interviews, something that I felt was very important right from the first steps was that the teenagers and I were on the same page as to what this research project really was. I wanted there to be complete transparency regarding how the process worked, and the expectations that were hand in hand with their participation. During this time, I also realised that there were many covert expectations, on my side, but also on the girls' side. As the interviews progressed, these came out in bits and pieces.

"I have one reservation about doing this. And that is that I feel like the other girls who ride have been very affected by their horses and any problems they've had they bring them here, you know with their horses and stuff. I've never really worked like that."

For example, in this exchange, one of my covert expectations came to light. This co-researcher felt like there was pressure to bring a particular product to the table, to tell me that the horses were necessarily therapeutic and healing to her, and if she could not bring that, that her voice would not be useful to this exploration.

Although I had always made a point of not forcing a particular point of view, through keeping it highly collaborative, and unstructured, these expectations still crept in. Becoming aware of this was uncomfortable, and the discomfort told me that here was some research gold to be worked with. Here, I could learn from the process. Firstly, it asked of me to look back over my interactions with co-researchers up to this point, and to examine where it was that I had non-verbally, or verbally, required particular answers. I realised that, in a sense, there had been an unspoken belief within me – that horses were always therapeutic in the way that they had been for me. I had to check this belief, in favour of allowing more diverse exploration, and to allow multiple voices to come in. Secondly, I then had to decide how I would check this inherent belief of mine. Becoming aware of it already a big step, but I felt that I also had to become more aware of my languaging around the topic. From there on, I decided to open the language further, so as even on a very basic level, the vision board was

opened up even further, for all opinions, not only the opinions that sounded like the fit with the research questions and my expectations.

This process made me aware of how transparent our lenses can be, mostly to ourselves. Often, we have only the best of intentions to not impose our own views. However, unexpected surprises creep in, as they did above. I realised very practically, that we were all entering into this space with lenses, something I had before only understood intellectually. The task was then to become aware of these lenses. But more importantly, to not negate these lenses in favour of a sterile ‘objectivity’. Rather, to bring these lenses to light for all to see, and allow for discussion. I believe that this is where the third space may be enacted, not through a negation lenses, but rather through a frank discussion of these covert beliefs, and the co-construction of a new, third space, between us.

In the interviews, I decided to not present myself as the objective interviewer, or to inhabit that view internally. Initially, I declared the impact that the horses had on me now, as well as how they impacted me as a teenager. I felt like this was very important for a number of reasons. First, I wanted them to realise that this wasn’t just a case of performing for the interviewer, and saying whatever they felt was correct. I wanted them to say what they felt in their hearts. Second, as a way of making my own journey of individuation, which ran so concurrent with this process, overt. I wanted it to be very clear, both to myself and to them, that this was about them and me, but that finally, the process can only serve to reflect the researcher’s own journey, individuation, and processes. An example of this was:

“But the most important thing in my life at that time was my horses. Because I was busy changing, my horses seemed to be sort of the one thing that was there to support me, and when my parents had a fight I could go complain to them, when I had problems with friends my horse was my friend, when I was having breakdowns and being a teenager because teenagers are supposed to have breakdowns, my horse was always there and my horse didn’t judge me, anything like that.”

Interviews and Power Differentials

I chose to go into the interviews without a interview schedule of any sort. At the onset of the interview, I usually stated a broad overview of what I would like to discuss, focussing

attention a bit more on horses, or adolescence, or even the research process and their feelings about it, as time went on. These focal points were informed by where we were at the time with the interviews, as well as what had become very relevant to my own process at the time of interviewing. Sometimes, I was guided by practical considerations, such as themes that necessarily need to follow-up from previous sessions. However, there were times when something came up which was very important to me, which touched painful places to me, or to the kids, or both of us together, and then those themes became the center of attention. Yet further, there were times when I allowed my gut, my dreams and my intuition to guide the process entirely. Sometimes, I would come with the intention to start with a particular topic, and worked with that for a while. Yet those topics were sometimes derailed by other more pertinent topics where seemed to arise out of the very bedrock of the project, out of our collective process at the time. At those times, I often abandoned the initial topics (to be returned to later), in favour of what was emerging as relevant at the time.

Another reason for choosing against a interview schedule was that I wanted to take power away from myself as the researcher. I framed this project from day one, to myself and to the co-researchers, as a collaborative, co-evolving project. For me to have entered into the interview space with a prescribed set of questions, would have been to take too much power and too much responsibility into my hands. I provided the frame, which I felt was enough structure for the process to take place. From there, questions came from me as I felt them emerge, and the teenagers often ran with the process as they saw it fit. They often initiated questions on their own, and they often grilled me on the very topics I wanted to elicit from them. Overarchingly, the meta-frame of these co-responsible, co-powerful interviews was that of respect, emergence and co-discovery.

An example of this was the discussion regarding the work they would do after the interviews. This discussion took place very early on in our interviews. I was surprised by how willing the teens were to take ownership of the process, and how, once they had been given the reins, they were quite willing to run with it:

Amber: I'd like to do a collage. Then I can put in all the things that I like.

Janine: I like the poem idea. Because I mean...you can choose a poem that is applicable to how you are experiencing your teenage years right now.

Lexi: Maybe a mixture of them. A mixture of a poem, collage and journalling.

The Research Process (for them)

Discussing the research process became quite elaborate at one point. The girls liked to hear about the process, what it would entail, how the final product would look. An interesting exchange that took place was the question of how it would be assessed. On a superficial level, it was a simple question: Is this for marks? I answered this, and immediately realised that there were two further implicit questions there: 1) will my responses be evaluated in any way? 2) if I don't work hard, I will feel guilty because you, Steph, will possibly be evaluated poorly. Both questions were relevant.

"I'd rather like to do it justice. And give it proper time."

A number of similar ones followed as we became more comfortable in the space. I continuously tried to reassure my co-researchers that the responses were not a pass/fail kind of situation, but instead, that we were explorers of a topic, and that any angle could be taken at the topic, even if we eventually felt like it went nowhere. Second, I had to reflect seriously on how much girls' were invested in myself doing well in the final evaluation of this piece of work. This felt like quite a significant pressure to them, because they did not want to let me down. I reframed this by saying that this project truly wasn't my own, but our project, and that in the end, the research journey was more important than the final evaluation. However, I also felt that it needed to be made explicit that as much as these aims were true, we could not hide the fact that there was the discomfort of the fear of evaluation. I chose to allow the discomfort to be articulated, instead of it remaining covert and unacknowledged.

Research Ethics and Prior Relationships

During one point in the research discussions, Amber and myself were discussing a particular horse whom we had both ridden on the yard. I had ridden this horse for a long time, and become very close with him, but had been unable to continue riding him or to buy him. This was a sad topic for me, but one that I was willing to discuss. At the same time, Amber had been asked by the owner of the horse to ride him and possibly compete him at shows. This was a great opportunity for her, but she felt uncomfortable about riding the horse that she knew I loved and had to give up. Although we had discussed this many times on the farm,

and I had reassured her repeatedly that I had no worries that she was working with him, in fact I was happy that she was, this remained something that we were both sensitive about. Put plainly, it was unfinished business for the both of us.

Insofar as the research, I knew that there were basically two options available to us in our discussions. The one was to remain quite superficial in our discussions, and avoid the uncomfortable topic entirely. For a while, we both covertly agreed to do this and to avoid the uncomfortable topic. However, the process was to interfere. Amber brought something about to the table, and I misheard her and heard that he had been sold, which was very upsetting to me at the time. Process forced the issue, because we then had to engage on this topic. Our second option was then somewhat forced, and we were both uncomfortable with it at the beginning. We decided to talk very openly about the discomfort between us, and to take the bull by the horns, so to speak.

We discussed all our issues and difficulties very openly that day, and although it was difficult, it was something that had been necessary for both of us. From a traditional research perspective, this is a difficult interaction. I articulated this to Amber:

"I have to say this, it's really difficult to do these interviews with you guys, because we already knew each other outside of the interview."

Our discussion that followed was very frank and very honest:

Steph: And I have to honestly say it brings up difficult stuff like the Africa thing.

Amber: I know, and it's hard for me to talk about it.

Steph: It's so sensitive for me too. Shall we make a suggestion then?

Amber: We don't speak about Africa?

Steph: The opposite, I think. If we want to say something, we say it, whatever it is, we talk about it. Not avoiding any issue.

Our personal relationship, in a sense, intruded on the research at this point, and traditionally would probably have been grounds to throw out the interview, and probably cease interviewing with one another at all. However, we are not objective machines, and we are never able to be objective. Ethically, I feel that my responsibility at this time was to

articulate the difficulty, to discuss it in a respectful manner, and to always remind her that she was free to withdraw from the project.

What came of this interaction? Research and personal offshoots. Personally, we were able to deepen our relationship, and as Amber articulated in the next interview:

"It brought us closure."

This was something powerful in itself, and something that I appreciated greatly. In terms of the research, our interaction was also powerful, because it brought about a deepening in our co-exploration process, where no topics, emotions or intuitions were taboo anymore. Having discussed a great personal taboo topic, we were able to deepen our research exploration exponentially. It is a case, as I feel Romanyshyn (2007) would have agreed, where we allowed our collective wound to lead us deeper into the project, deeper into the circle of discovery.

Opening and Closing Spaces

"It was cool, talking about it. I've never spoken about it."

As I mentioned elsewhere, we all agreed as co-researchers that the space opened by these discussions was unique. Although we had a times discussed our horses socially, and had seen films or read poems that touched a deeper resonance with us, we had never had an opportunity to sit together, a group of similar minded-people, and discussed our relationship with our horses. In this space, we had a chance to re-iterate what we already thought we knew, and hear that others felt the same way, or differently. We also had a chance to explore more deeply, and work through topics that had never been examined, or that had never even come up before in our horse community. This was exciting and enriching in itself. It opened up new sets of connections between us all as co-researchers, as well as between the co-researchers and the horses, spaces that had at times become stagnant or taken for granted. The act of story sharing, of exchanging narratives, was transformative. This was not an intention of the process, but it was a happy effect.

What strikes me as difficult is closing the space. A clear need emerged between us, to continue with this process, even on a less formal basis than it had been done until now. Ethically, as well as personally, decisions now lie ahead of me, but also us, about how we

proceed with this. As with the rest of this project, this will be debated between all of us who participated.

A Turning Point Experience

“In helping both clients and apprentices navigate their psyches, we often used the archetype of the centaur Chiron, the wounded healer, as an inspiration for trusting the process, for unearthing the gift behind the wound.” (Kohanov, 2007, p. 6)

I think this is the space to talk further about the journeys that have paralleled one another so intensely for myself and the co-researchers. I’ve spoken elsewhere about the isomorphic journeys that the girls and I experienced, and the synchronous fashion in which these journeys have mirrored one another throughout this exploration.

There is another journey, one which is more difficult to include, but one which constantly visits covertly. I have mentioned this visitation before, in short anecdotes. During this research exploration, I was also moving from my safe, university world of psychotherapy training, into a frightening world at an acute psychiatric hospital, where I would be working as an intern for a year. One of my greatest fears in this change was that my research would have to fall on the backburner, or even worse, that the work would somehow lose all significance to me, in the face of this new, frightening work.

In a synchronicity which is as difficult to express as it is to fathom, the first interaction I had with a patient at the hospital, was a powerfully numinous moment that told me that I needn’t worry – the work would continue. In fact, the work would evolve and become deeper.

The first patient I met at the hospital was a young woman who told me her story: she had always been a horse girl, horses had always been a safe place for her, a protective factor in her life, the fall-back when everything else fell away. At the age of sixteen, in a powerful parallel of my own journey, she, too lost her horse, and she lost her horse to exactly the same set of circumstances as I did. When I heard this story, I was astounded again by how this universe works. How, in all the hundreds of patients in that hospital, and the 15-odd interns working as psychotherapists, had the two of us come together in such a bizarre coincidence? Even more, I might never even have gone to this hospital, I might have been placed at any number of other places. She might have been placed in any other hospital.

My first instinct was again the affirmation I had received before: the time has come, this exploration must continue, this work must happen. It was an affirmation I needed, desperately at sea at that moment myself, desperately unhappy in a strange and clinical environment that looked nothing like a place I could call home.

But it was much more than that – this girl and I would be in a therapeutic relationship. In that first moment of realisation, options flew like frightened birds trapped in a room, a million shattering mirrors. What do I do here? First, I am this girl's therapist, I have to find a way to work with this grand narrative, this story that carried her life so powerfully, to this moment here. Second, she was touching on my blind spots in a manner I do not think as a neophyte therapist could imagine experiencing – not only is she dealing with emotions I have had to deal with, but she is telling me a story that might as well have been my own. How do I join with this girl in a way that is respectful of our isomorphic journeys, but at the same time respectful of the fact that her experience will be different from mine, will diverge from mine at points? How do I not impose my pain onto hers?

In the realisation of this, I find myself again in that place where I realise the power of this individuation journey. On day one of the next step of my life, I was confronted smack bang with it, right in the face. There was no way around this. The wound that carried me into this research exploration, the wound that carried me into and through years of depression and elaborate suicide plans, the wound that had carried me into psychotherapy, was the first wound I would have to deal with in my becoming as a therapist. It was almost beyond belief for me, at the time. Even now, I am confronted by the implications, on the level not of mind but of spirit and soul, of this moment in time.

Traditionally, a therapist is supposed to be a blank slate, a *tabula rasa* upon which a client can project, where transference and counter-transference can be used to work through the *client's* problems. Nowhere in any book have I found reference to it being a place where a therapist can be confronted with her deepest wounding! Inasmuch as this is disallowed in the literature of psychology, it is denied more often than not in research. Yet there I sat, and I knew with utter certainty, that this was a bridge, again a bridge, between worlds, one that I had no choice but to work with. I am reminded of the words I heard in a dream, now almost a year ago:

“Animals have hands. Humans do too. There is a space between the worlds. We use those hands to be in that space, being in the space between the worlds.”

To be honest, I find these links astounding, and frightening. They speak of a world that I denied for years through angry, reactive atheism. They speak of a world that I'm being constantly called closer towards. They speak of a link between horses, humans, and soul, that goes down deep into the collective unconscious, deep into a space of archetypal connections between all events and all souls, that transcendent function that Carl Jung (1960) conceived of.

These discoveries change everything, they change the very basis of what I believe.

Further Musings on the Myth of Objectivity...Holding the Sacred Space of Possibility

As I mentioned before, the girls and I framed this exploration as a co-research project. We were all researchers in this, and we were all bringing our personal ideas and expectations to the project. During one such a discussion, I had an exchange with Amber which again sheds light on the difficulty of our choices:

Steph: I was actually thinking, it's very hard to do this with you guys, because we know each other too well.

Amber: Why?

Steph: You know, usually, you'd interview someone who is a stranger to you, and you get to know them from the interview. With you guys there's so much history, it's almost like you're not quite sure what space you're in.

Amber: Yeah.

Steph: I don't know if you also find it hard?

Amber: I know what you mean.

Steph: If I was talking with strangers, the information would be more about them. But because it's shared history we're talking about often, it's completely different information.

Amber: But, it's also more accurate.

I was surprised by Amber's response at this point, and also surprised by the insight she showed in saying this. I had spent many years of undergraduate and postgraduate studies being brainwashed by the myth of objectivity. I am still busy dealing with the consequences of that brainwashing, and the discomfort comes out in my research at times. Amber, on the other hand, said it like it is. We're discussing shared information, and since we were often both there, that makes this reflection more powerful. Even when we were not discussing shared experiences, we were weaving stories together that came from a place where we had all learned and loved tremendously. To her, subjectivity was not the sin I had been taught to believe it is. Together, we were able to work with that belief that to bring in shared history, to bring in subjectivity, was a mistake. In that sense, my co-researchers certainly rehabilitated me from the tentacles of brainwashing that still held me.

However, within this frame, I do believe that ethics became even more important than before. There were times when we discussed events that had emotional charge for one or all of us. These times were sometimes individual events, but they were also at times shared between some or all of us. Within this, we had to be very respectful with each others' narratives. This was, I think, achieved due to the nature of the definition of the space, which was inherently co-creative and co-exploratory. Pain with dealt with through respect and holding, and open-hearted acceptance. Happiness and achievement was shared. When taboo and shadow raised its head, it was explored, held, resolved or shelved for a next discussion, as time allowed. Within this, I had to make choices about what would make its way onto the final research. As far as possible, I never gave details about events that happened. If events were shared, I always changed details which were non-essential to the story, and asked permission for the words in the final draft of this work. To take it one step further, I gave this work to each and every co-researcher, and they read everything, striking what they felt uncomfortable with. Finally, I made very sure that they understood that this information would be available for others to read.

In this work, I shared many painful stories I have never shared with anyone. I told stories which were deep shadow work for me, and I revealed wounds not yet fully healed. This was my choice to do, out of a deep belief in the value of the work, and the obligation I felt to the process. What surprised me endlessly was the willingness of my co-researchers to do the same. They did not hesitate to speak about uncomfortable feelings they had, about memories and experiences which sat less than happily with them. They opened their

hearts, spirits and souls to this process, and gave and gave. They gave themselves, they gave their horses, they gave their hurts, they gave their memories, they gave endless and endless willingness and energy to this project. This is something I will always be sensitive to, but also something that I will always be thankful for. I believe this journey, expressed on paper, would not have been what it is, were it not for this remarkable opening of researchers, together. I would never have been able to share my individuation journey so bravely, were it not for these courageous co-researchers, who held the sacred space of possibility (Barry Ingram, 2013).

Kohanov (2003, p. 112) describes this sacred space of holding, as she felt it in her horses:

“They move in closer and stand next to the person in turmoil. They participate empathically, remaining fully present with what is happening, creating a psychological container for support.”

and

“It’s an active form of patience unattached to outcome, allowing someone in a place of uncertainty to feel supported through the darkest night of the soul.”(Kohanov, 2007, p. 117)

As our horses held the larger space, we held the sacred space of possibility for one another. This is an experience that is frightening, deepening, and widening. It’s a vulnerable space, and that might explain some of my discomfort at times in the writing of these passages. In the end, this research is not the product on paper that lies before the reader. The research was a journey, an exploration, of this sacred space of possibility between a group of co-explorers, co-story-weavers.

“Yet words alone can never do justice to the
Experience
People have with these animals.”

(Kohanov, 2007, p. 2)

CHAPTER 5

INTEGRATION AND CONCLUSION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Tesch (1988) suggests that the emergence of themes in research, and the final representation of any experience represents both a synthesis, and a reduction.

“It is a synthesis in the sense that it brings together elements. It is a reduction in the sense that it abstracts to a higher level of generality, stripping away the situational.”
(p. 234)

These words represent my difficulty with representation of the themes which have emerged from the research exploration. Certainly, there is value in synthesis, in finding central themes which may apply to a wider context. But similarly, I fear that by decontextualising these themes, by giving them any freedom to be applied elsewhere, I may be committing a violence to the original context of emergence.

Bateson (1979) and van Maanen (1984) recommend a way out of this discomfort which seems workable. Instead of viewing themes as generalisations, instead, to view them as metaphors with which to discover the “knots in the web” (van Maanen, 1984, p. 59) or the “patterns that connect” (Bateson, 1979, p. 8).

I return to my unspoken research question, which came to the fore after my period of stuckness: What is it about adolescents and horses? What is the magic between teenagers and horses? This question drove my choosing this topic for research purposes, and remained quite silent and dormant throughout my initial process of working with the literature. It was always there, it was certainly the impetus which drove the process, but it was largely unacknowledged. In retrospect, working through Hiles’ (2002) phases of heuristic indwelling, I became aware when the question chose to make itself known. My initial choice of topic, my deep engagement with the horses and the adolescents, indwelling for months in the process, these steps allowed my question to remain dormant. It was covered by a need to

speaking appropriate academic language, and the pressure I felt as a neophyte researcher to still tow the line, inasmuch as I verbalised it differently at the onset of the work.

In short, I knew the way forward in my head, but it had not yet settled into my heart. The tacit knowing still needed time to bubble up. Through a natural progression, I found myself in the next phase of Hiles' (2002) process, sifting and gathering experiences and narratives, waiting and allowing for tacit knowing to emerge. Here, I hit a place of stuckness, reflected by the blank page earlier in this document. I reflected, I remained stuck. I tried all different avenues, and I remained stuck. I gave up, I remained stuck. I fought against my stuckness, knowing very well that resisting was futile.

Finally, I softened, and stepped back into allowing. Through my allowing, the question again resurfaced, such a simple question: What is the magic between teenagers and horses? Connected to this by a subtle yet powerful strand was the wound: What was the magic between me and my horses? Once these intuitive questions were allowed to enter gently back, they freed up the entire process. Because, inasmuch as this is an academic paper, a research paper, we are guided to our explorations by our wounds, and the intuitive soul-graspings we make after the magic we can sense but can never say. This allowed me to "see afresh" and perhaps feel afresh, within the internal and external context of this project (Finlay, 2012, p.175).

I was able to enter into the final two stages suggested by Hiles (2002), which was formulating a synthesis, informed by participation and authenticity, and establishing the validity of this work by sharing. This chapter represents a very simple synthesis. The chapter on themes already detailed my understanding of each of these knots in the tapestry. In this chapter, I will reflect primarily on one basic theme, which seemed to me the golden thread that ran throughout the work. My sharing is represented by the co-researchers each taking their own time to give input into the process as it came to a close, and looking at the themes to offer their views of the validity of the narrative. And of course, my final sharing is the relinquishing of the work into the world, allowing it to test its own sea legs, to stand on its own if it can.

5.2. THE CENTRAL KNOT

“The classic definition of healing is to make whole.” (Schoen, 2001, p. 164)

“She keeps me alive. I credit everything good in me to her. She's the only one.”

“Maybe...we're in the middle of the onion, and the layers around us are the horses keeping us together.”

“He's my everything.”

“It's my own world, where everything is perfect.”

“At the horses I'm totally different, at the horses it's a different world. I can be myself. This is my time.”

Horses hold the sacred space of possibility (Barry Ingram, 2013). Kohanov (2003, p. 112) calls it a space of fully engaged patience: “open, non-judgemental, respectful of a person's inner wisdom.” Psychotherapists train for years and spend the rest of their careers working at it, healers are trained in the holding and facilitation of sacred spaces, but horses do it naturally.

In the preceding section, many themes emerged around adolescent phases, rites of passage, projection, transcendence, liminality and special bonds with special horses. In the literature review, the benefits of EAP were listed, and the characteristics that horses bring to EAP, from size, to mirroring, to increased self-esteem to symbolic metaphoric work. All of these may be more or less applicable in this exploration, and more or less useful in the space of equine healing, but I believe that the nexus is simple, and yet far from simple: Horses hold spaces for us, as and when we need them; facilitating whatever process takes place within that space with grace, patience, and a special skill for transcendence.

“Horses are remarkably resilient when they sense an opening. It's like they've been waiting, for thousands of years, to catch us off guard so that they can help us

remember who we really are – in part, I suppose, so they can finally be appreciated for who they really are.” (Kohanov, 2003, p.114)

Adolescence is a time of life-altering transition, as we have seen, one way or another, everything changes. Rites of passage have always been marked by metaphoric or symbolic events: birthdays, cultural rituals, the simple giving of a gift. Furthermore, rites of passage are usually facilitated by an elder, a wiser member of a group or tribe (Williams, 2013).

In our modern, Western society, rites of passage, of which adolescence is a central passage, are often neglected. They are marked by a birthday or a gift, but the sacred space of possibility, the space where the transition is held, is often lacking. Because of this, we have a society where the young people are often stuck between childhood and adulthood, directionless and guideless. The magical energy of the transformative experience was never transmuted effectively through a suitable alchemical process.

Horses, by their nature, provide empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard (Chardonens, 2009). They already provide the conditions of worth for transformation, for deep self exploration, for the painful and rewarding process of becoming. They provide the ideal foundation, the grounding, for adolescent transformation. Yet, they do something more. In the myths we explored earlier, Epona and Chiron offer further movement, they offer transcendence. Horses are by nature beings of the collective, beings who function within the herd. Through their link with the herd, and with the collective, they provide a space for adolescents to transcend their isolation, and a connection to a wider ecology, of horses, friends, nature and spirituality. As Avens (1980) emphasises, myths do not ground, they open, and horses provide this vital mythological opening to the transitional space.

Horses provide grounding, and opening...a somewhat contradictory statement. Still, they are able to provide both, and in doing so, they also provide that third, reconciling space between the two, they provide bridges where, without their holding, there would have been none. Horses become, in effect, the elders of our collective tribe, the shamans that bridge the spaces necessary to hold the rite of passage of adolescence. They hold the sacred space of possibility, which is both contradictory and reconciliatory. If we are in pain, they hold pain. If we are in transition, they hold transition. If we become smug and complacent, they provide a swift kick and a shake from this stuckness. They are therapists, shamans and healers, and they bring these powerful skills to us daily, whether we ride them for pleasure, use them as

‘co-therapists’ in equine assisted endeavours, or whether we let them take their own reins, work with us, and bring their full healing repertoire.

They facilitated on multiple levels during this research exploration. Initially, they facilitated my own journey through adolescence, and planted that spark that was needed to proceed with this work. Thereafter, they continued and continue to facilitate my own individuation journey, through self, psychotherapy, and healing. They supported each adolescent in this study, through their own transformations, which are on-going. Finally, they held this entire process, from inception to completion (inasmuch as anything is ever completed), from first shaky steps, through interviews, to our closing, and even beyond, as their facilitation can hopefully open new doors in our human horse relationships in the future.

5.3. A CLOSING RITUAL

“I write about my moments of desolation and my moments of illumination.” (Beer, 2011, p. 142)

It’s a quiet Saturday afternoon on the riding yard. All the lessons for the day have been completed, all the work is done. The saddles have been put away, sweaty horses have been cooled, and are eating their lunch meal peacefully. The five of us, myself and my four adolescent co-researchers, are tired and hungry, cold and windswept. Everyone is excited – we’re having our final research meeting.

I have mixed feelings. Part of me is excited, to finally finish this project that consumed more than two years of my life. But a large part of me is really sad, grieving in fact. This project may have consumed my life, but it’s been the most interesting and exciting two and a half years I’ve ever had. I wouldn’t exchange it for anything. Some have called it “dissertation wobbles”, that feeling of being so nearly done that you can smell the finish line. I think I might be holding back slightly, hesitant to finally get there.

Our first order of business, discussing the ending of the project, and the way forward. I’m happy to hear that my co-researchers feel the same way I do about the opening and closing of

the space. The research may be over, and that will soon come full circle. But the space of learning and healing that we've co-facilitated between us, with the horses, should remain open. We will continue to meet periodically, discussing the horses and our lives, and how they will always be intertwined. This leaves me feeling relieved and fulfilled. One, that this space was useful for more than just the purpose of research, and that we are all in agreement that we should continue. Two, that the exploration will continue at all, well beyond the academic paper exploration, but into the real world of living and doing and feeling. It feels like a validation of my fears and anxieties in previous sections.

Next, we perform a two-part closing ritual, including both humans and horses. On the human end of the spectrum, we draw cards from Linda Kohanov's (2007) deck of cards, *Way of the Horse*. Megan's card reflects the change and transition in her life, she instinctively knows that this card reflects her process. Janine draws a card and her face instantly tells us that she got what she wanted, the picture alone is enough to validate the experience. Amber draws a card which connects well with her as a person, describing a process she will have to deal with in the near future. I draw a card with a sad looking, faded horse on it, and I know immediately: Depression. I am that sad, faded horse, as this journey draws to a close. I am really sad about this circle completing, I would have stretched it much further if I could have. But all things must come to an end.

Amber asks to draw one more card, and I spread the deck again. As I spread the deck, a gust of wind comes through the cards, and a card leaps into the air and into my hand. Synchronicity strikes again, and the card is the same as before: Depression. Amber draws another card, which links powerfully to her relationship with her pony, Tinkerbelle. We explore some of their background together, and realise how meaningful this card truly is to her relationship with her pony.

We discuss the cards for some time, and the synchronous fashion with which each card matches an important place in our lives. Then, we carry our ritual to the horses. We walk around the farm, handing out carrots to each of our equine facilitators, thanking each of them for their contributions, not only in our lives to date, but in the research process itself. My heart squeezes with sadness as I reach my black mare, Vanity. She reminds me that someone is not present here today: Rainbow. I go to a quiet corner of her pasture and bury a carrot there for Rainbow, resting my hand for a moment on the earth and thanking Rainbow. She

wasn't present in the traditional sense, but she was there all along. She started all of this, in her own way.

Rainbow, I know, I have to believe you're here, watching. I don't know how or why but I know you are.

Later that evening, as I sit and write this conclusion, I read my card again. Something in it draws me beyond the sadness of my grief, and into another difficulty which entered this work continuously. Kohanov (2007) refers to depression as a warning sign, a sign that we might not be doing our own authentic work, and that we may be stuck in old patterns that no longer support our soul-work. I look back over this dissertation, and I can say with some conviction that I am doing what I understand to be my authentic work. But within that, I see a question and a tension: the tension between the traditional, Western psychology of my training, and the holistic work of shamanism and healing. As the work progresses, my language leans towards one, and then the other. I suspect that this card is more than a description of my current sadness, it's also a suggestion of future challenges in the tension between psychology and healing. At this juncture, I can but take note, be aware, and open a space for this new journey to progress as only soul-work can.

5.4. Epistemological Borders

Towards the end of this process, I took one final look at the literature. I was curious to see what emerged during time that I had left the literature search dormant. I was particularly curious to see in which directions the fields of psychotherapy and equine healing were taking a turn. The work I discovered was methodologically rigorous, scientifically correct, and appeared to me to be largely of a more positivist, objective frame of thought. Kemp, Signal, Botros, Taylor and Prentice (2014) conducted a program evaluation study of equine therapy with children and adolescents who had been sexually abused. Although the work points to efficacy in the therapy, their approach to research, the therapeutic environment, and the horse, speak of a frame which does not allow openings for individual subjectivities, and for an expansion of the role of horse beyond mere 'tool' of therapy. The same positivistic approach is reflected also in the work by Cantin and Marshall-Lucette (2011); Hauge, Kvaalem, Berget, Enders-Slegers and Braastad (2014); Johansen, Wang, Binder and Malt

(2014); Selby and Smith-Osborne (2013); and Yorke, Nugent, Strand, Bolen, New and Davis (2013).

These studies are punctuated by language-ing which refers to the horse primarily as a tool in therapy, and a call for more methodologically rigorous, positivistically-framed research, specifically of a quantitative nature. This heavy emphasis on “evidence-based everything” (Cowling, 2008, p. 249) in the field of equine facilitated therapy, psychotherapy, healing and journey-work is an interesting turn, and not one that I am particularly comfortable with, as the preceding pages attest. Although I have no question that these studies have a place, I am faced with the question that Cowling (2008, p. 249) also struggles with: If we are to be obsessed with a “relentless drumming for evidence”, how are we to define then what evidence is appropriate? As Shahjahan (2011, p. 186) comments dryly:

“Evidence is assumed to be neutral, a fact that stands alone, and the production of evidence is also considered a neutral process. ...only through evidence can an ideal order and outcome be brought to the world...”

From the recent studies, I am forced to believe that the larger academic community still require use of the dominant forms of representation, of ‘evidence’, those pieces of work that make lofty and questionable claims to positivism, objectivity and neutrality. I sense a stifling voice coming in, one saying: “All this qualitative, self-reflexive, narrative research is just fine, but don’t forget the true point of research, which is to establish the grand narrative, to discover some final truth in the matter.” Gustavson-Dufar (2011, p. 29) refers to this voice as the “research gauntlet”, and it worries me greatly that the voices of those on the borders must be sent through a gauntlet, which by its very language-ing makes for a rather harrowing product and potentially dehumanising process.

It appears that the language of positivism still largely maintains its power over the field of mental health (Alex, Whitty-Rogers and Panagopoulos, 2013). I wonder, however, about the voices of those who do not fall into the traditional evidence categories - this work among them. I worry where the representational spaces are that allow those working at the borders, those who are marginalised, to be heard? (Harris, 2014). I worry about where the ideas of an epistemological break from positivism, of an insistence upon so-called neutrality and objectivity, have gone (Lather, 1986), and the idea that research must be empowering and allowing for opening. As Gorman (1993) emphasises, research must surely be a product of all involved, an attempt at giving voice to the silent, situated within a context, self-reflexive

throughout; if it is to have meaning in a postmodern context, in a context such as feminist research. If we are to remain in the frame of mind that sees qualitative representational work as interesting and different, but finally only useful if supported by hard and solid numbers, I am uncertain where the future of equine-related therapy and healing lies.

The language used to represent these works of course also represent and enulcates the work itself, the maps, theories and approaches come to represent the territory. Much of equine-related therapy is outcomes based, following an instrumental and highly prescribed, almost dogmatic approach, focussing on cognitive behavioural (CBT) or here-and-now therapy approaches, with the aim of achieving, for example, the alleviation of symptoms of depression. These fields of psychology are well-researched and valuable, but they neglect the other elements of experience. Karol (2007) suggests that equine therapy should be expanded beyond the narrow fields of outcome-based therapies, beyond the medical and evidence-based doctrines of Western epistemologies, and into a broader therapeutic environment which supports a more complete therapeutic experience, where the journey-process is valued, not necessarily the outcomes, where the space is created for being, instead of simply becoming. In this vision, therapy and healing would be aimed not only at alleviation of symptoms, but at the journey of interaction between beings, and at the co-discoveries made along the way. This also changes the language away from a deficit-illness-based approach to therapy, to a journey space (see for example Garcia, 2010; Kohanov, 2001, 2003, 2007, 2013), where all processes are seen as a larger journey of individuation, of discovering the self, the other, and the collective.

5.5. FUTURE RESEARCH

This exploratory journey opens many more spaces for future research. This study was conducted with co-researchers who were not receiving equine-assisted therapy, and therefore was not focussed specifically on therapy. It would be interesting to conduct a similar study with adolescents who have received a course of equine-assisted therapy, and ask them to reflect on the importance of their relationship with a specific horse.

Furthermore, this research asks questions of the current equine-assisted paradigm, of the role of the horse within it, and the future of the field. Will horses always remain ‘tools’ in the

field, or will their space expand into an acceptance for equine healing as a legitimate field on its own? The question becomes, will this field function within the world of psychotherapy, or branch off into healing and shamanistic practices?

This study may be expanded in any number of ways: working with more co-researchers, with other age groups, with boys as well as girls, working from different paradigms. All of these would be valid and important studies to help expand this powerful and, in my opinion, vastly undervalued field in healing and psychotherapy.

5.6. VALIDITY

As I mentioned before, Hiles (2002) suggests that validity of a qualitative research exploration such as this may best be achieved through the sharing of the results. Validity was addressed through the constant sharing and co-discussion of the material in this work. I was the leading researcher, as the person who will be the one who receives the final degree. However, Amber, Janine, Megan and Lexi were consulted on every major decision, and were particularly involved in data collection and data analysis. From a social constructionist perspective, this is the highest form of validity that may be asked for – consensual validity between all co-researchers.

Nagy Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2008) emphasise that as research develops into different forms of representation, traditional validity simply cannot be appropriate as a measure. Different measures of validity must be considered, and Faulkner (2005) suggests one such a set of poetic criteria. This criteria is focussed on both scientific and artistic criteria, a set of criteria which I feel suit this work well.

Scientific criteria includes a focus on depth, authenticity, experience, trustworthiness, understanding of human experience, reflexivity, usefulness, articulation of craft/method and ethics. The artistic criteria include compression of data, understanding of craft, social justice, moral truth, emotional verisimilitude, evocation, sublimity and empathy. Finally, poetic criteria are emphasised to be embodied artistic concentration, discovery, conditional, narrative in nature and transformative. These criteria hold the researcher to a standard of validity, but also support the difficulties understood by Nagy Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2008,

p. 5) in their statement “sometimes we feel we’re *on to something*, but traditional methods and tools do not allow us to access it or represent it to an audience.” (original italics)

This criteria for validity allow for experimentation, a way to find and express that *something*, while still holding researchers to a standard of work. This standard for validity also proposes “the hybridisation or merging of the two [artistic and scientific criteria] to create a third space for contemplating what counts as knowledge, paralleling the third voice [...] Nagy Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2008, p. 14).

5.7. FINAL WORDS

“It is not for the artist or author to entirely dictate the sequence for reading. Make of it what you will. Find your own path through the pages.” (Flach, 2008, p. 13)

In closing, I hope that this was the experience of engaging with this text. As I found my way through the process, and through the pages, I hope too that each reader found their own way through the pages. There comes a time when the work can no longer be held close to the chest, where I must trust it to stand alone. And while it stands alone, that it will be open and create openings with others, to see different aspects, strengths and weaknesses, blind spots and different avenues inviting to be pursued.

The final words: what *is* the magic between adolescents and horses? In the end, this is only one suggestion, one possible truth in a multitude of truths, all open to interpretation and co-creation. This opens one possibility, I hope that it closes none. More than anything, I hope that this work creates further openings, for further exploration. I hope that at times this work was difficult, and provocative, because writing can be no good if it only comforts and maintains. I hope that it was heartfelt, and that some of my journey, and the journey of my co-researchers, both human and horse, echoed with others. I hope that it is an invitation to others. I hope that it has opened, for some, as it did for me, new paths to the soul, and new avenues of soul-making.

The Road goes ever on and on (Wrapping-up)

Of all the parts and processes in this dissertation, this is the one I least enjoyed and most resisted. These few pages gave me more difficulty than all the other pages contained within this work. I ask myself why?

This section provides a wrap-up, a pulling-together of all the elements in this journey. Surely I would enjoy this, plucking on the various discordant and sometimes concordant strings that hold this tapestry together? Surely I would be excited at this phase, to be able to reflect back over the process, over this three year becoming that started with but a single step? I even considered editing these last words, these reflective words about the final part, the frustration and unhappiness I felt. This is not the place for it, I tell myself. This is supposed to be a place of finality and closing off. This is supposed to be a place that provides a coherent frame, suggestions for a usable praxis, a name to this journey, something tangible to hold onto.

I have none. Not as I sit here.

I realise this writing also represents an end, a closing; coming to the start/end of the circle. This writing represents a punctuation that is very clearly nameable: end. I'm not a big fan of endings. Especially not of something that provided so much growth and excitement and purpose to my life. When I punctuate linearly, I resist endings because I don't like matters coming to a close. I'm a psychotherapist, I want to unpack and unpack everything until

I know the final thread, the dye that was cast, the sweat that went into the weaving. There's always something more to discover here, I say. I'm also a wounded healer/re-searcher, and I fear that by healing the wound I lose my calling, I lose the sense of immense purpose and raison d'être that carried me through both agony and ecstasy over this expanse of time. What if this is all there is, I fear? Such fears keep me awake at night. They keep me wandering.

Which makes me realise that this work is exactly that. A wandering, a stroll through a particular landscape. A meander through a landscape I'd always been challenged by, a landscape that has always beckoned me. As with all wanderings, at times I have direction, at times I get hopelessly lost. At times I tire, and I sit down for a break and a cup of tea. At other times, I surge forward with incredible energy and direction. Sometimes I stub my toe, sometimes I get a blister. Other times, I see beautiful sunsets, rivers I imagine no one else has set foot in, I meet people along the way that change the journey forever. Sometimes I want to stay with these scenes forever, but I am always drawn forward by the wandering. This same wandering that represents the tension of stay/go, push/pull now. I want to stay and I want to go. Because beyond this landscape lies a new one, an unknown one. A rather scary one. But who knows what beauty lies there?

I get ahead of myself. I jump ship on this process because I fear the good-bye. There will be goodbyes when it is time.

These few pages represent a map of the landscape. As I meandered, I discovered some interesting places and people.

Sometimes, I saw them coming, and wrote about them pre-emptively. Sometimes, I was entirely surprised by their arrival, and their presence can be felt in furtive scribbles and drawings in the corners of pages. On this map, I draw together the elements that shaped this journey, those things that held the entire journey together, those discoveries we talk about even when the journey is over. The things that became central, and changed us forever. The pages are different, they don't all match. There's dust, mud, tears, blood, and a fair amount of other unidentifiable things on these pages. For sure, a large amount of spilled tea. I wish I could include every last discovery here, every nut and seed picked up, every stubbed toe, every stick I walked with, every lovely scene. I will have to suffice with the central ones, and believe the reader will discover the rest on their own terms.

This said, over the next few pages I will highlight some of the central themes of the journey, a conclusion; a suggestion as to how to follow the more comprehensive map inside. As I fear reifying anything too much, I suggest that these themes be approached playfully, with an open mind, and intuitively. They were important for me, they made sense to me, they meant something to me. I hope they suggest something of the journey, but I would never want these markers to be the final summary of the journey. If they are useful, wonderful. But as you have wandered along these paths, stopped at places that interest you, watched scenes that fascinate you, wandering new roads I never even noticed...these are also part of the journey.

Stop 1: the Bricolage and postapocalyptic research (Kincheloe, 2001)

As I meander, I come upon the ruins of an ancient temple. On other journeys, I had heard legends of this temple, once powerful and imposing. It is the temple of objectivity, of science. I see that there are still some intact facades, but that the foundation appears to be crumbling. Kincheloe (2001) had also discovered this temple, or a similar one, in his journeys through the landscape of research. He suggests that once we discover that we live in a world that is socially constructed, and that all knowledge is but a construction, we see that science, too, and all its children, are also mere constructions. With this great implosion (Kincheloe, 2001) of what we thought was stable, “we must operate in the ruins of the temple, in a postapocalyptic social, cultural, psychological, and educational science where certainty and stability have long departed for parts unknown (p. 618).”

In retrospect, I suspect that I have been doing exactly what Kincheloe (2001, p. 618) suggested postapocalyptic researchers do, which is to “pick up the pieces of what’s left and paste them together as best they can.” From an early stage in my academic career, I felt an intense discomfort with the received knowledge. I was lucky (or unlucky!) to have been exposed to Lyotard, Lather, Irigaray, Foucault, Freire and Feyerabend from undergraduate training. Their insistent questioning of the status quo, the accepted knowledge, the truth, reality, power and social critique

took root within me, and slowly became solid foundations from which my own thinking emerged. Their influence permeates this dissertation, at times in gentle suggestions of difference, at times in deliberately belligerent rantings against those who still seek to tell me that there is such a thing as objectivity.

I constructed this entire bricolage, this tapestry of difference, only to discover the concept of the bricolage and the bricoleur after the fact. I resonate deeply with the concept of the bricolage, and would even go so far as to call myself a bricoleur through and through. As Kincheloe (2001) emphasises, the process involved in the bricolage means learning from difference. This work indeed does not only allow or tolerate the voices of difference, I actively engage them in my co-researchers and myself, I cultivate the spark of difference with the eye of allowing multiple voices, but also to subvert the dominant paradigm of sameness. I actively engage myself to be sensitive in the analysis, on philosophical, epistemological and ontological levels of understanding and construction.

“The bricolage understands that the frontiers of knowledge work rest in the liminal zones where disciplines collide.”

(Kincheloe, 2001, p. 689)

As I emphasise in my section on method, the bricolage represents at its basis a form of boundary work, or working on the borderlands. The bricolage makes sense on a large scale, on a process level of this work. In my wanderings, these elements are always present.

Bricoleur/age

Boundary work/Borderland wanderings

Bridge/Shaman

Transcendence/Equine healing

Adolescence/Transition

These words serve as markers for this process, but also for future discovery. These markers also lead me into introducing a level of complexity in this work. This complexity is embedded centrally for me in the notion of the implicate order of reality, which refers to a much deeper structure of the world (Bohm & Peat, 1987), “the level at which ostensible separateness disappears and all things seem to become part of a unified process.” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 328). It is at this level that the wor(l)ds above are linked, and became linked through powerful synchronicities in my life.

Stop 2: Rigorous (Messy) Reflexivity

From hesitant first steps, backpack heavy with gear and shoes still hard; to the final steps, throwing down my load and rubbing my weary toes, this work is dotted with my own reflexive musings. Newman (2011, p. 554) articulates the importance of this act “in studying the complex relations of the body, the self, and reflexivity - and representing the ‘self’ and the ‘Other’ in just and reflexive

ways - we must be aware of, and limit the violence created by, our 'em-bodied selves', along the way."

My heuristic approach to reflexivity was informed by a number of central ideas. First and foremost, I was guided by Robert Romanyshyn (2007), who adapted the wounded healer concept into an understanding of the wounded researcher; one who is guided in their re-search process by an awareness of their own unconscious and conscious wounds, the wounds that led them to their re-search-discovery journey. I knew that I had been drawn to the horses and the adolescents as a topic due to my own fears and discomforts around these experiences in my own life.

Initially, I resisted the idea of bringing myself so centrally into the research. At times, especially in the first part of this dissertation, this resistance is still visible. Later, as I became more comfortable in my own journey of individuation, I also became more comfortable in my own voice within the text.

Reading retrospectively, I also feel a higher level of integration and flow in these sections, where I am able to integrate my own voice respectfully with those of my co-researchers. These are also the places that feel the most numinous, the ones that engage myself, and hopefully the reader, on a higher level of complexity. Higher levels of reflexivity are also reflected later, as I become more comfortable with myself as a psychotherapist, as a researcher, as someone discovering the world of healing and becoming.

Secondly, I realised that in order for me to fully honour the voices of complexity from my co-researchers, both human and equine, I

would have to honour my own voice, too. Initially, I felt the highest focus would be on the voices of the human co-researchers. I wanted to represent their multiplicity above all.

The horses very soon made me realise that this would not be the case, as they entered further and further into the research process, gently and respectfully. Thereafter, it was only a short leap to realise that I could not truly call them co-researchers, if I did not allow my own voice to also enter into the journey. The reflexivity here is therefore bound within the intersubjective circle of interpretation, mine and theirs, one informing the other, the one opening for the other, the one always deepening the other.

Thirdly, the entrance of my own voice was also a political act, along the lines of the work done by Foucault (1994) and Lather (1991, 2006). In my deep distrust of objectivity, I realised that the exclusion of my own voice would be exactly what Freire (1970) had warned against in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, that I had so internalised the voice of objectivity that I feared the freedom of using my own subjective voice. I spoke a good game, I wanted to allow for a multiplicity of complex subjectivities, but on a process level, I had yet to integrate that this included my own voice. I feel that by the time I threw down my walking stick and started writing the final pages in this journal, I have to some extent been able to resist the voices telling me that my voice was not important, that my own subjectivity was of no value. I suspect that in a Foucaultian sense, through the simple inclusion of my own reflexive voice, I have been able to resist some of the attempts

of a will to power, and instead decentralised my own power, spreading it equally along all co-researchers.

Stop 3: Human/Equine co-being (Haraway, 2003)

As with any journey, the person who starts the journey is not the same one who ends it. The one who asks the question will not survive the answer of it. Wandering along a broken line, I encountered my co-researchers one by one, and we stopped at times to meet, to exchange a kind word, have lunch, enjoy the view.

*Amber, who challenged me to think on different levels, from the banal to the profound, often requiring mental gymnastics for me to keep up with her, as she jumped effortlessly from topic to topic, sometimes even in the same sentence. Megan, who brought me words like *duende*, and made me aware of some of my unconscious expectations of them and the process, and who spoke of her horse like a family member and a best friend, who challenged me to think well beyond the scope of what I thought was possible with horses. Janine, who called me always into being aware that the research space was not only a passing thing, but something that could be used well beyond the scope of this project, and should be. She taught me that you can make difficult decisions, and survive with dignity. Lexi, who fully and truly*

made me aware of the sensitivity and the power of the world difference.

These co-researchers even redefined themselves in the process of the research. Their role transformed from the initial writings, where I still languaged them as participants, to the final stages, where they were fully fledged co-researchers. This change in language reflects metamorphosis in me, but it also reflects metamorphosis in them, as they grew, became more individuated during this journey, took charge of more aspects of the work, became more willing to engage directly and openly, sometimes on very difficult topics. On a meta-level, this also reflects one of the most important goals of their adolescence, which is their own individuation and differentiation, finding their own voices.

The human co-researchers were not the only co-researchers who found their voices. As Haraway (2003) and Maurstad, Davis and Cowles (2013) contend, we are not separate, but companion species, co-participants in an on-going process of becoming with each other. As Haraway (2003, p. 17) suggests, “partners do not precede their relating.” Although the human co-participants are more represented verbally in this dissertation, the horses by no means took a back seat. Their presence is felt throughout, and their individual entities were often felt beside me, galloping powerfully, or simply grazing quietly. My own horses were often powerfully present, Rainbow, now only in spirit form, and all my other equine healers. The co-participants horses were always present in our languaging and becoming: Tinkerbelle, Admiral, Africa, Luna, Alcatraz, Tokyo, Gibson, and Spirit. All these

equines held such an important space that we even named it: Equine Facilitated Research. They held when holding was needed, they provided feedback during all stages of the process, they perturbed when perturbation was called for. They were willing at all instances to be, and to be-come with us. They stepped well beyond their roles as steeds, as tools in therapy; into their true selves, carriers of transcendence, always on the liminal, shamans, bridges to our souls, and the soul of the world.

*Stop 4: Archetypal Journeying, Mythopoetic Research
(Romanyshyn, 2001; 2007)*

We journey on different levels. During this wandering, we have stepped through the realms of the physical, the intellectual, and emotional. Without planning to go in this direction, this wandering was also drawn into the world of the numinous:

Archetypal,

Myth-making,

Transcendence,

Soul.

The first signs were the dreams, which so powerfully drew on archetypal themes that the energy of the dreams alone sometimes drove this journey. The voices of Jung, Hillman, Romanyshyn,

Stoker Signet, Kohanov, Estes, Rumi, and many others became interwoven into the text, calling always on the soul.

This research became research with soul. The usual dictates were present, those of academic requirements, marked by such words as validity, reliability, empiricism, ethics, methodology, ontology et cetera. Yet these dictates seemed to be continually overwhelmed by the numinous moments, those moments where the horses took charge of the situation and galloped off with wild abandon, where dreams took over and guided the process, where spontaneous themes and feelings emerged and had to be followed regardless of what the structures dictated, where images, metaphors, poems and myths became more important than what was expected of the process.

This is an archetypal and mythopoetic journey, with pauses at the home of the horse Goddess Epona, at the cave of the wounded healer Chiron, a stop for water at the Hippocrene, detours into the collective unconscious and the soul. These stops were not planned, as all the best stops are. These stops were not anticipated, I was merely lucky enough to be willing to stop, feel, listen at moments as they presented themselves. This work could not have existed without these necessary detours, which in fact became the main route through the journey.

I also feel that we have collectively dreamed up new avenues of discovery: new ways of being together in the research space, new ways of expanding research into the world, ways of relating to our horses that encourage true co-being, ways of allowing horses to be the truly autonomous wounded healers that they are, and myths

that still yet suggest the questions of fresh and unexpected emergence, not yet known.

Now far ahead The Road has gone,

And I must follow if I can.

In closing this wandering, it is worth taking a quick glance back to the start, where the boots were first strapped on, the backpack was first packed, and walking stick first donned. A nervous start. I have drawn four central golden threads through this dissertation:

- 1. The postapocalyptic researcher and the Bricolage as boundary work and social critique.*
- 2. Rigorous and Messy reflexivity as a way of honouring a multiplicity of subjectivities.*
- 3. Human/Equine co-being, co-becoming with and co-healing.*
- 4. Archetypal journeying and mythopoetic research, following the soul, dreaming up the new.*

These were some of the most important stops on the journey. As a closing coda, I suggest that this dissertation represents something of a new dreaming up, Equine Facilitated Journey Work, which simply refers to the journey of the preceding 180-odd pages. There may yet be space for this Journey Work to expand, to be run with in the future. I mentioned earlier that I felt that there are new

*processes already underway, but that I could not see them.
Perhaps Equine Facilitated Journey Work forms part of these
processes. If it does, I would like to suggest to myself a new way
forward, as an adapted poem/musing, inspired by David Whyte
(2003):*

White horse stuff

If you are brave enough,

Step out of your tiny home

Forget the weight of your own alone.

Into a new, larger world:

Dark

Unknown.

Learn to love the unknown

And the dark.

Honour the spark

That set you upon this calling

There are larger homes awaiting

Everything is waiting for you.

“We are as the waving grasses and the drinking sun.

We are the horses that are their own beings,

And the human beings whom they love as much as the pale clouds and the dim past.

We are the ones who love like thunder.

I watch the horse.

She is running.

I am whole.”

(Prince-Hughes, 2007, p. viii)

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