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## SOCIAL WORKER PERCEPTIONS OF EQUINE ASSISTED PSYCHOTHERAPY

Melanie Woolen

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SOCIAL WORKER PERCEPTIONS OF EQUINE ASSISTED  
PSYCHOTHERAPY

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Melanie Ann Woolen

June 2017

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## ABSTRACT

This research study examines factors that influence a social worker's willingness to utilize animals in therapy, specifically equine assisted psychotherapy. Equine assisted psychotherapy is an experiential therapy involving horses for the treatment of mental and behavioral health issues. The study uses quantitative data. The sample population is Bachelors of Social Work (BSW) and Masters of Social Work (MSW) students attending a University in Southern California. The participants were provided an electronic self-administered survey through their University email account. The data collected was analyzed and the results were provided to the University. The results indicate a relationship between several variables, such as previously owning and/or caring for a pet and fondness of animals, however, there are likely other factors that predict the use of equine assisted therapy that were not explored in this study. The results of this study will help raise awareness about equine assisted psychotherapy and the benefits of utilizing this non-traditional treatment.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
CHAPTER ONE: ASSESSMENT	
Introduction.....	1
Research Focus.....	1
Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm.....	2
Literature Review.....	3
Description and Purpose of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy.....	3
Treatment Implications for Children and Adolescents.....	6
Treatment Implications for Adults.....	7
The Use of Animals in Therapy.....	8
Methodical Limitations and Gaps in Research.....	10
Theoretical Orientation.....	11
Potential Contribution to Micro and Macro Social Work Practice.....	13
Summary .....	14
CHAPTER TWO: ENGAGEMENT	
Introduction.....	15
Study Site.....	15
Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers at Research Site.....	16

Self-Preparation.....	17
Diversity Issues.....	18
Ethical Issues.....	18
Political Issues.....	19
Role of Technology in Engagement.....	19
Summary.....	20

### CHAPTER THREE IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction.....	21
Study Participants.....	21
Selection of Participants.....	22
Data Gathering.....	23
Phases of Data Collection.....	23
Data Recording.....	24
Data Analysis.....	24
Termination and Follow Up.....	25
Communications of Findings and Dissemination Plan.....	26
Summary.....	26

### CHAPTER FOUR EVALUATION

Introduction.....	27
Data Analysis.....	27
Demographic.....	27
Key Variables.....	30

Sentiment and Experience with Animals: Participant Standpoint.....	30
Willingness to Use Animals in Treatment: Participant Standpoint.....	31
Data Interpretation.....	34
Implications for Micro Practice.....	36
Summary.....	37
 CHAPTER FIVE: TERMINATION AND FOLLOW-UP	
..... Introduction.....	38
Termination of Study.....	38
Communication of Findings and Dissemination Plan .....	38
Summary.....	40
 APPENDIX A: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT.....	
APPENDIX A: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT.....	41
 APPENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM.....	
APPENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM.....	44
 APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT.....	
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT.....	46
 APPENDIX D: DEBRIEFING STATEMENT	
APPENDIX D: DEBRIEFING STATEMENT	
REFERENCES.....	51

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Basic Demographic Characteristics of Participants.....	28
Table 2. Additional Demographic Information .....	30
Table 3. Significant Variables .....	33

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Household Income .....	29
Figure 2. Ownership of Companion Animal (pet).....	31

# CHAPTER ONE

## ASSESSMENT

### Introduction

Chapter one covers the research question and hypothesis for the study. This study is designed to examine social worker perceptions of equine assisted psychotherapy. The rationale for using the positivist paradigm in this study is explained and discussed. A review of current and past literature involving the research focus is also included here. To conclude this chapter, contributions to the field of micro and macro level practice are provided.

### Research Focus

The research question for this study is what are social worker's perceptions of equine assisted psychotherapy? According to the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA), equine assisted psychotherapy is defined as an experiential therapy involving horses for the treatment of mental and behavioral health issues. Equine assisted psychotherapy is utilized to treat a variety of mental and behavioral health issues including, autism, PTSD, substance abuse disorders, conduct disorders among adolescents and eating disorders (EAGALA, 2012).

The hypothesis for this study is that social workers who have experience in caring for and owning animals and knowledge of the approach, will have a positive perception of equine assisted psychotherapy and thus be more willing to utilize animals in treatment. The causal relationship between social worker's

perceptions of equine assisted psychotherapy and numerous variables is discussed.

The dependent variable in this study is social workers' willingness to utilize equine assisted psychotherapy. Social workers' willingness will change based on the following independent variables. The independent variables, or factors believed to influence the aforementioned dependent variable, include social worker's existing knowledge of equine assisted psychotherapy, social worker's ownership of companion animal(s)(having a family pet), history of animal interactions(extended family or friends who own animals), and overall sentiment toward animals(negative or positive attitudes toward animals). The data from this study will allow social workers an opportunity to consider alternative treatments for their clients as opposed to conventional methods.

#### Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

The positivist paradigm, according to Morris (2006), "assumes that an objective reality exists outside of personal experience that has demonstrable and immutable laws and mechanisms" (p.3). The primary goal of this paradigm is to identify the laws and mechanisms of human behavior through causal and correlational relationships. In following this perspective, data was gathered to address the research question and subsequently measure and manipulate the data in numerical form (Morris, 2014).

The positivist paradigm is the most appropriate approach for this research topic as the research question is causal in nature. The purpose of the study is to

find out how various factors influence social worker's willingness to utilize equine assisted psychotherapy. This is best measured through quantitative research using statistical data analysis. Following the positivist paradigm and using quantitative data allowed for a larger sample of social workers to be studied. A larger sample is beneficial to provide an accurate representation of the general population and reduce external validity. In addition, there was minimal bias between the researcher and participants as the collection tool was an electronic self-administered survey. This type of quantitative data provides a clear measurement testing the hypothesis that social workers with experience owning or caring for animals are more inclined to utilize equine assisted psychotherapy.

#### Literature Review

The literature review includes the description and purpose of equine assisted psychotherapy. Also discussed are the populations that can benefit from equine assisted psychotherapy and factors that influence social worker's inclusion of animals in treatment. The methodical limitations and gaps in research of social worker's willingness to utilize equine assisted psychotherapy will be discussed.

#### Description and Purpose of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy

According to the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (2012), Equine Assisted Psychotherapy is defined as, an experiential therapy involving horses for the treatment of mental and behavioral health issues. It is a collaborative effort between a licensed therapist and a horse professional that

involves clients and horses to address treatment goals. Equine Assisted Psychotherapy is generally short term in length, typically 12-16 sessions, due to the intensity and of the treatment process.

For centuries horses, have been used in many ways to heal humans. According to Bizub, Joy, and Davidson (2003), horseback riding and horsemanship were used during Ancient Greece to help comfort those that were suffering from untreatable and incurable illnesses. The therapeutic benefit of horses became largely recognized when equestrian, Liz Hartel, won the silver medal in the 1952 Olympic Games for Individual Dressage. Ms. Hartel was afflicted with Polio and suffered partial paralysis (Notgrass & Pettinelli, 2015).

Until the late 1990's the therapeutic benefit of horses was thought to be primarily physical. There are two large agencies that have developed a treatment model and utilize horses for cognitive, emotional and behavioral modifications. The first is PATH International, which has a specific program entitled "Equine-Facilitated Mental Health", however this agency largely focuses on physical and occupational rehabilitation. The second is the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA). EAGALA was developed in 1999 and the specific treatment model is called Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP). EAP is the primary model used amongst clinicians in the field of mental health and social work (Notgrass & Pettinelli, 2015).

The EAGLA Model consists of several components. It is based on a team approach and members include an Equine Specialist, a Mental Health

Professional, the client and the horses. The sessions are conducted on the ground in an arena and no horseback riding is involved. The model is solution oriented and allows for the clients to problem solve, experiment and take risks with little direction from the clinician during the session. EAGALA adheres to a Code of Ethics and standard of practice. There is an ethics committee in place and protocol for ensuring best practice (EAGALA, 2012).

The EAGALA Model is founded in metaphoric learning. During the sessions, “effective and deliberate techniques are utilized where the horses are metaphors in specific ground-based experiences” (EAGALA, 2012). Interactions between the client and horses help clients recognize their behavioral patterns in real life. The Mental Health Professional designs a treatment plan based on the client’s needs assessment and desired goals and this treatment plan is implemented and modified throughout the duration of treatment.

The skills that are developed and used in equine assisted psychotherapy translate into life, creating positive change and improving the lives of many. Horses are prey animals and thus are greatly attuned to their surroundings. Horses tend to mirror human emotion which helps to foster self-awareness. An individual’s behaviors, attitude and pheromones can impact the behavior of the horse. Once this is recognized by the client, it helps to facilitate emotional regulation. As a result, behavioral improvements are construed to real life interactions outside of the arena where the treatment occurs (EAGALA, 2012).

## Treatment Implications for Children and Adolescents

Horses are especially useful in the treatment of adolescents. Horses tend to mirror human emotion which helps create emotional awareness in individuals. An individual's behaviors, attitude and pheromones can impact the behavior of the horse. When this is recognized by the client it helps to foster emotion regulation that results in behavioral changes and improvements, specifically among adolescents (Carlsson et al., 2015).

The equine assisted psychotherapy environment also promotes openness and authenticity for adolescents as opposed to traditional clinic. Children and adolescents that have endured abuse and neglect, witnessed violence and suffer from eating disorders, often do not respond well to a typical clinic environment and might benefit more from an unconventional treatment environment (Lentini & Knox, 2009).

Equine assisted psychotherapy offers many other benefits to at-risk adolescents. Adolescents that tend to be withdrawn and insecure and many have developed confidence and effective communication skills because of equine assisted psychotherapy. Empathy has also been shown to progress in adolescents and this will positively affect their moral development later in life. It has also been demonstrated that at-risk adolescents have used the skills they developed through equine assisted psychotherapy and applied them to other areas in their lives improving their overall well-being (Burgon, 2011).

## Treatment Implications for Adults

There are many ways in which equine assisted psychotherapy can benefit adults. Adults that have interpersonal problems and diminished social skills can benefit tremendously from this type of treatment (Mallow, Mattel, Broas, 2011). These aforementioned characteristics are typical of those involved in substance abuse. According to Mallow, Mattel, and Broas(2011), the use of animal-assisted therapy, specifically with those with substance abuse disorders, displayed an improved commitment to treatment and strong therapeutic alliance. These two factors are extremely important when treating substance abuse disorders and can greatly improve outcomes.

The use of animals, especially horses, is thought to be healing for those with a history or trauma. There are many qualities that horses possess that can easily be related to human emotions and interactions. This idea seems to be an effective treatment tool as it allows a client to connect and build a non-judgmental, honest, relationship with a horse that is later reflected in their human relationship (Mallow et al., 2011).

Equine assisted psychotherapy has been shown to help reduce violent and aggressive behaviors in individuals that are severely mentally ill. A controlled study was completed in 2011 sampling 90 long-term psychiatric patients. Patients were enrolled in equine assisted psychotherapy, canine assisted therapy, enhanced social skills training and regular hospital care. The results of the study indicated that the patients that received equine assisted

psychotherapy showed the greatest reduction in violent behavior for several months after treatment was initiated. These patients also required less 1:1 supervision and behavioral interventions (Nurenburg, Schlefier, Yellin, Shaffer, Desai, Amin, Bouchard, & Montalvo, 2014).

There has been a great deal of focus on how equine assisted psychotherapy can be beneficial to Veterans. Often Veterans returning from service have re-integration problems as a result of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injuries. The problem is so profound that the United State Department of Veteran Affairs has sponsored a Horses for Heroes program that works with various equine therapy programs across the country to provide equine assisted therapy to Veterans. Often social settings can be overwhelming for veterans that have returned from deployment. The Horses for Heroes program allows Veterans to work individually with a horse and therapist and this process helps to create confidence and relationship building through the use of horses. The skills and relationship building that are created in the therapy session with the horse and clinician are then used in their everyday life. (Lovell, 2015).

### The Use of Animals in Therapy

Research by Risley-Curtiss, Kawam, and Rogge (2013), indicate that social work practitioners that own companion animals are more likely to include animals in interventions and be open and willing to treat clients for the loss of an animal. This is significant, as over 63 percent of U.S. households have

companion animals and pets provide joy and companionship to many individuals and families. Animals and humans have a strong connectedness and the influence and use of animals can be beneficial when integrated into social work practice (Risley-Curtis, Kawam & Rogge, 2013).

There are several ways in which animals should be considered for use in social work practice. Companion animals are generally viewed as family members and are a part of the family system and therefore should be considered during an initial family assessment (Risley-Curtis, 2010). One way family functioning can be explored is by identifying and assessing for animal abuse and cruelty. The occurrence of animal abuse and cruelty is often an indicator of a dysfunctional home environment. In return animals can also have a therapeutic impact on family members, such as abused children talking to their pets and alleviating loneliness for the elderly (Risley-Curtiss, 2010).

The realm of animal assisted therapy is gaining a lot of attention in the field of social work. One example is the University of Denver's Graduate School of Social Work has an Institute for Human-Animal Connectedness (Tedeschi, 2013). The faculty in this Department indicate that animal assisted interventions greatly help to foster a relationship between the client and clinician by providing a comfortable and safe environment (Tedeschi, 2013). In an article by Jackson (2013), Philip Tedeschi, executive director of the Institute of Animal Human Connectedness, stated that, "Animals can often be a very valuable bridge back to

establishing a human relationship. They help build trust and can give people the sense that that they can have positive relationships again” (p.6).

### Methodical Limitations and Gaps in Research

Since the early 1990’s equine assisted psychotherapy has grown tremendously in the United States and parts of Europe. There are over 700 centers in the United States that offer an equine assisted psychotherapy program. The programs proclaim that the bond people create with a horse is an extremely positive and effective change agent (Bachi, 2012).

There has been a great deal of research conducted on the efficacy and benefits of equine assisted psychotherapy indicating positive treatment results. Thus, with research indicating it is an effective treatment, the question now is, what determines a clinician’s willingness or unwillingness to utilize this treatment? There appears to be a large gap in this area of research.

According to Risley-Curtis et al., (2013), there are several factors that were found to affect the inclusion of animals in treatment. The primary treatment group affected the social worker’s inclusion of animals, for example, those clinicians working with the elderly were more inclined to include animals in therapy.

One of the most profound findings from the study was that social workers that knew other social workers that utilized animals in treatment were more inclined to utilize animal assisted therapies in their practice. It was also found that social workers and mental health practitioners that owned a companion

animal had an increased likelihood of utilizing animals in treatment (Risley-Curtis et al., 2013).

In conclusion, the field of equine assisted psychotherapy is rapidly expanding and growing and many social workers and mental health professionals are utilizing alternative treatments such as equine assisted psychotherapy. Conversely, due to the recent resurgence of equine assisted psychotherapy there is little data on factors related to the decisions to utilize animals in the treatment process. Research indicates that equine assisted psychotherapy is effective and useful in treating a variety of conditions among diverse populations. However, there is a need for more empirical studies in regards to the factors that affect a clinician's use of animals in their practice

#### Theoretical Orientation

Equine assisted psychotherapy uses an attachment theory perspective and orientation as a guide for treatment. According to C. Zastrow and K. Kirst-Ashman (2013), Attachment is defined as, "a strong affectional tie that binds a person to an intimate companion" (p.135). Attachment style is thought to be created in childhood and infancy and an adult's relational expectations, emotions and attachment behavior is typically based on their attachment history (Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer, and Shaver, 2011).

There are numerous ways in which the principals of attachment psychotherapy are applied to equine assisted psychotherapy. A fundamental concept in attachment psychotherapy is the principal of re-creating a secure base

with the therapist through the use of the horse. The utilization of horse in therapy provides a unique environment that enhances rapport building and creates an opportunity for trust to develop between the horse and client and the client and therapist (Bachi, 2013).

In attachment theory, a caregiver's face is considered the child's first mirror, that is, the mother reflects the infant's reactions in her expressions. Horses have the same quality, according to Birch (2013), "a horse's ability to mirror emotions, behaviors and physical elements of a person is one of the central features that provides a basis for the human-horse bond" (p.192). It is believed that creating a bond with a horse it will help repair the attachment issues reflected in human relationships. Essentially the horse is an extension of a human attachment and through the bond created with the horse the individual will learn to trust and feel safe during real world interactions (Geist, 2011).

Mentalizing refers to a person's attention to their mental state. Equine assisted psychotherapy has been shown to help clients recognize relationship and attachment patterns in their current lives based on their past experiences. Nonverbal communication and body experience are also important aspects of attachment theory and related to equine assisted psychotherapy through the process of grooming and touching horses. This process of touch creates trust and be translated to an improvement and increased comfort with human physical interaction (Birch, 2013).

There is an easy connection to attachment based psychotherapy and the dominant features of equine assisted psychotherapy. Much of the research on equine assisted psychotherapy uses an attachment theory perspective by re-creating a secure base with the horse that allows the participants to rebuild trust and repair relationships in their lives. Continuing to implement attachment theory concepts into equine assisted psychotherapy will enhance and improve the credibility of equine assisted psychotherapy (Birch, 2013).

#### Potential Contribution to Micro and Macro Social Work Practice

This study will potentially contribute to micro and macro areas of social work practice. In regards to micro practice, the results could help raise awareness about equine assisted psychotherapy and the possible benefits of utilizing that specific type of treatment. Equine assisted psychotherapy has been shown to effectively reduce PTSD symptoms in Veterans and build trust, self-esteem and communication skills in adolescents and adults. A social worker's awareness of equine assisted psychotherapy might result in more referrals to this service which could result in significant therapeutic benefit to clients. At the macro level, increased exposure and research about equine assisted psychotherapy will ideally result in increased funding for this service. As a result of more funding and exposure, equine assisted psychotherapy contracts with local mental health agencies might increase.

## Summary

This section introduces the research study's question and hypothesis. The justification for the use of the positivism paradigm is explained. The literature review provides a description of the topic and explanation as to the reason why this study is relevant. A summary of current research on the topic is also discussed. The theoretical orientation was described and contributions to micro and macro social work practices were discussed.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ENGAGEMENT

#### Introduction

Chapter two will cover the description of the study site. The engagement of gatekeepers and prospective participants will also be addressed as other preparation used for the study. This chapter will cover diversity, political and ethical issues that might be encountered. The possible use of technology in the study will also be covered.

#### Study Site

The study site for this research project is a Social Work program in Southern California. The students that were sampled are enrolled in a Bachelor of Social Work (BASW) or Master of Social Work (MSW) Program through the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. The Social Work students either attend classes on campus (full or part-time) or are enrolled in an online distance education program. There are 168 students enrolled in the MSW program and 110 in the BASW program and the vast majority are female. The average age of the students is 31 years old. The University offers many degree programs at the Baccalaureate and Masters Level in the human and behavioral sciences, Arts, Business and Natural Sciences (California State University San Bernardino, n.d.)

The region is characterized by a warm sunny climate year surrounded by mountains to the north yet and beaches approximately 50 miles south and west.

The average household income is \$71,000 per year and the majority of the population is Caucasian and Latino (Next 10, n.d.).

The Social Work Program at the study site is nationally accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. The mission of the program is to “provide accessible, dynamic, and rigorous academic programs that prepare students with foundation and advanced professional values, knowledge and practice skills to effectively enhance the well-being of the diverse populations and communities of our region, state and world” (California State University San Bernardino, n.d.). The program utilizes a generalist model and graduates are skilled in the areas of micro and macro social work practice.

#### Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers at Research Site

The gatekeeper for the study site is a University Faculty member and their title is Director of the School of Social Work. A formal email was sent to the Director with an introduction, description the study and request for permission to sample the student population of the School of Social Work. The email included a detailed description of the study and the potential benefit the study will have on micro and macro areas of social work.

The email to the gatekeeper described the following, the study utilizes a quantitative method of data gathering using a self-administered, online survey. The prospective participants would be emailed a link for the survey. The students would also be provided an Informed Consent and advised that their participation is voluntary and not required by the University. The data collected

from the students would be recorded and saved into a confidential software program. The data gathering would occur over a period of two months and no cost is incurred by the University or participants.

The results of this study will help raise awareness about equine assisted psychotherapy and the benefits of utilizing this non-traditional treatment. Social worker's awareness of equine assisted psychotherapy could result in more willingness to refer to this service, which could result in therapeutic benefit to clients. There is a large gap in research as to what factors influence a social worker's decision to include animals in the treatment process and this study will contribute to that specific limitation.

#### Self-Preparation

Self-preparation included a thorough review of the literature on equine assisted psychotherapy and creation of a research focus and hypothesis. Numerous peer reviewed scholarly articles were read and considered to create a thorough literature review. Sensitivity and responsiveness to the study participants was considered throughout the research process.

The researcher considered that the study participants are students, and likely busy, their time will be respected and the electronic survey was brief, taking approximately 10 minutes to complete. The wording was easy to comprehend and avoided the use of equine specific terminology. A consent was also provided via email to the perspective participants that included a review of the

project and risks and benefits, if any. The debriefing section described equine assisted psychotherapy and the purpose of the research study.

### Diversity Issues

Diversity issues related to this study occurred during the development of the data collection instrument. The data collection instrument was created prior to data gathering and is a 15-question self-administered electronic survey. The data gathering instrument is sensitive to the participants varying levels of knowledge and attitudes of animals.

Specific equine related language and therapeutic jargon was avoided. It was created in a manner not offend or have a negative connotation if the participant is not fond of animals or has very little knowledge of the use of animals in therapeutic settings. There were no assumptions of terminology in the questions and the content was descriptive and appropriately explained. The questions are direct and written without judgment.

### Ethical Issues

There is the potential for ethical issues to arise in a positivist study due to the power differential that occurs between the researcher and participants (Morris, 2006). Any potential moral and ethical issues related to this study were mitigated through proper creation of the data collection instrument and an informed consent.

The data instrument was created in a manner that does not portray any level of coercion, as some participants might have felt obligated help a fellow social work student. The informed consent clearly stated that participation in the study is

voluntary and not required by the University or School of Social Work. The participants were advised that they can withdrawal at any time. Participants anonymity and confidentiality is protected. The data was stored in a confidential and secure software system that was only assessable by the researcher and the supervising faculty member. Data was subsequently transferred to the secure SPSS software for analysis. In addition, personal and demographic information requested was limited and optional to complete.

#### Political Issues

The political issues in the study primarily involved the gatekeeper at the study site. The researcher addressed the political issues through explanation that the study required minimal use of resources from the gatekeeper. The study was administered to participants online and did not require any financial resources from the gatekeeper or study site. The study required very little effort on behalf of the gatekeeper as engagement occurred via email and through an online survey.

The results of the study were provided to the gatekeeper and participants through a written report upon conclusion of the study. The study results will hopefully bring awareness and increased knowledge of equine assisted psychotherapy to the Social Work students. This awareness could increase the utilization of alternative treatment modalities potentially benefitting individuals.

#### Role of Technology in Engagement

Technology that was used during the engagement phase of the study, as was email communication with the gatekeeper.

## Summary

Chapter two covered the Engagement strategies of the research study. Engagement strategies and steps for gatekeepers were discussed as was self-preparation. Possible diversity, Ethical, and political issues were also reviewed in this chapter. Lastly, the use of technology in the study was addressed.

## CHAPTER THREE

### IMPLEMENTATION

#### Introduction

Chapter three describes the implementation stage of this study. Information is provided about the research site, study participants, and selection of participants. Also discussed is the data gathering process, phases of data collection, method of data recording and data analysis. Lastly, the termination process and dissemination of the study findings will be addressed.

#### Study Participants

This study's participants are MSW and BASW students attending a University in the southern region of California. The participants are social work students that are enrolled in the part-time or full-time program and attend classes on the University's campus and students that complete their coursework online. Social Work students gain professional experience and skills through advanced coursework and supervised field practice. They work to help people overcome life challenges addressing issues such as poverty, discrimination, abuse, oppression and mental health (California State University San Bernardino, n.d.).

The demographics for MSW students at this University are as follows: the program has 168 total MSW students, of these students 143 are female and 25 are male. The self-reported ethnic backgrounds of the sample population are as follows, 36 identify themselves as Caucasian, 21 African American, 76 Hispanic, 2 as Pacific Islander, 2 as Alaskan Indian, 3 as two or more ethnicities and 28 as

Unknown. The average age of MSW students is 31 years old. The statistics for the BASW students are as follows, 110 total students, 98 females, 12 males and the average age is 29. Based on self-report, 75 of the students identify as Hispanic, 12 are Caucasian, 6 African American, 2 Asian, 3 Non-Hispanic and 10 as Unknown (CSUSB statistical factbook, 2015).

The region of southern California where the University is located, has a warm sunny climate year round with an approximate population of 4.2 million. The average household income is \$71,000 and the average age of the residents is 35 years old. The ethnic composition of the region is 48% Caucasian, 31% Latino, 9% African American, 8% Asian and 4% other (Next 10, n.d.).

#### Selection of Participants

This study is descriptive in nature, as it will examine the correlational relationships between independent and dependent variables (Morris, 2014). The method of selecting participants is based in probably theory and will utilize the convenience sampling method. The use of convenience sampling is required as the sample population is limited to students at the identified State University.

The sample size for this study was all BASW and MSW students. The sample size was determined based on the minimum number of participants required to analyze and examine each independent variable. This is considered a reasonable sample size based on the desired amount completed survey's. This sample size allowed the researcher to generalize from the sample population to the population of interest, which is social work practitioners (Morris, 2014).

A description of the survey and a link to the survey was emailed to all students by a faculty member in the School of Social Work to ensure the privacy of student information. Each Social Work student was emailed the link for the electronic survey.

### Data Gathering

A brief description of equine assisted psychotherapy was provided to the participants prior to the survey questions. Demographic information was collected in the beginning of the survey and the informed consent was also provided. The participants were advised that their participation in the study was voluntary and was not required by the University. They were advised that they were permitted to terminate their involvement in the study at any time.

The survey included fifteen closed ended questions about the participant's personal experience with animals, such as, owning a companion animal and their sentiment and fondness of animals. Their knowledge of equine assisted psychotherapy and willingness to consider alternative treatments was questioned as well. The data collection instrument is attached in Appendix A.

### Phases of Data Collection

Data collection began in August 2016. There was one phase of data collection and that was to administer the data collection instrument to the sample population. The survey was a self-administered online survey. The participants were emailed a link for the survey, the link was available for 5 months. The

survey took approximately 10 minutes for the participants to complete and was available from August 7, 2016 to January 7, 2017.

#### Data recording

Data was collected and recorded through the use of an online survey software program, entitled Qualtrics.

#### Data Analysis

The data is quantitative and was entered into SPSS software and analyzed. To begin the data analysis a univariate test was conducted that displayed each variable's value in numeric form, this helped to organize and categorize the variables. The dependent variable is social worker's willingness to provide equine assisted psychotherapy. The independent variables are social worker's knowledge of equine assisted psychotherapy, belief in the animal-human connection, sentiment towards animals (attitudes and fondness) and history of animal interactions (grew up with pets/family and friends owning pets and time spent with animals).

The next step was to test the hypothesis, which is, social workers who have experience in caring for and/or owning animals will have a positive perception of equine assisted psychotherapy. The purpose here is to reject the idea that there is no relationship between social worker's perception of equine assisted psychotherapy and their experience in owning and/or caring for animals (Morris, 2014).

To do this, bivariate analysis was utilized to test the relationship between the dependent and independent variable. For this procedure, the dependent variable tested is social worker's willingness to provide equine assisted psychotherapy and the independent variable tested will be social worker's positive sentiment towards animals. Utilizing SPSS software to run a t-test will demonstrate the relationship or lack of relationship between these two specific variables. This is a representation for the sample population that social worker's that have positive sentiment and attitudes with animals are more likely and willing to provide equine assisted psychotherapy. Using the bivariate method to compare the distributions of the dependent variable in relation to the independent variable helped to determine whether the null hypothesis could be rejected (Morris, 2014).

#### Termination and Follow Up

Termination with the participants occurred upon completion of the survey. The participants were thanked for their time and informed that the survey had terminated. The participants were provided with the researcher's contact information should they have had questions or concerns. There was a short debriefing statement that provided additional education on equine assisted psychotherapy and recap the purpose of the study to ensure that no deception occurred.

## Communication of Findings and Dissemination Plan

The study findings were documented at the annual poster display on the University's campus. Results were also made available to the researcher's colleagues, participants and other interested parties, through an electronic data base, Scholar Works at the University of California San Bernardino.

### Summary

This chapter covered the implementation stage of this study. The research site, study participants, and selection of participants were addressed. A review of the Data gathering process, phases of data collection, method of data recording and data analysis were also covered. Finally, the termination process and dissemination of the study findings was discussed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EVALUATION

#### Introduction

This chapter contains information collected from the survey, including demographics and key variables. A discussion and analysis of the data is presented in this chapter. The study's contributions to micro and macro practice will be offered here. Lastly, a summary of the key findings is provided.

#### Data Analysis

This section covers the demographic information of the participants and several variables that were considered to be significant to the findings of the study.

#### Demographic

The study's sample population consisted of 110 participants. There were 100 female participants (90.9%), 9 males (8.2%) and 1 participant that identifies as other (0.9%). Almost half the participants were between the ages of 20-29 years (42.7%). The remaining were between the ages of 30-39 (35.5%), 40-49 (16.4%), 50-59 (4.5%) and above 60 years was (0.9%). In regards to ethnicity, 40.9% identify as Caucasian, 13.6% as African American, 0.9% as Pacific Islander and Asian and 3.6% as Other (see Table 1).

Table 1. Basic Demographic Characteristics of Participants

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency (N)</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
<b>Gender:</b>		
Male	9	8.2%
Female	100	90.9%
<b>Age</b>		
20-29	47	42.7%
30-39	39	35.5%
40-49	18	16.4%
50-59	5	4.5%
60 and above	1	.09%
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Caucasian	45	40.9%
Latino/Hispanic	44	40.0%
African American	15	13.6%
Pacific Islander	1	0.9%
Asian	1	0.9%
Other	4	3.6%

In order to gather additional information about the participants, they were asked other various demographic questions pertaining to religion and household income. These questions were asked to gain a further understanding of cultural aspects and influences related to the use of animals in treatment. The majority of

the household incomes of the population were quite low, likely due to the fact that the participants were graduate students (see Figure 1).

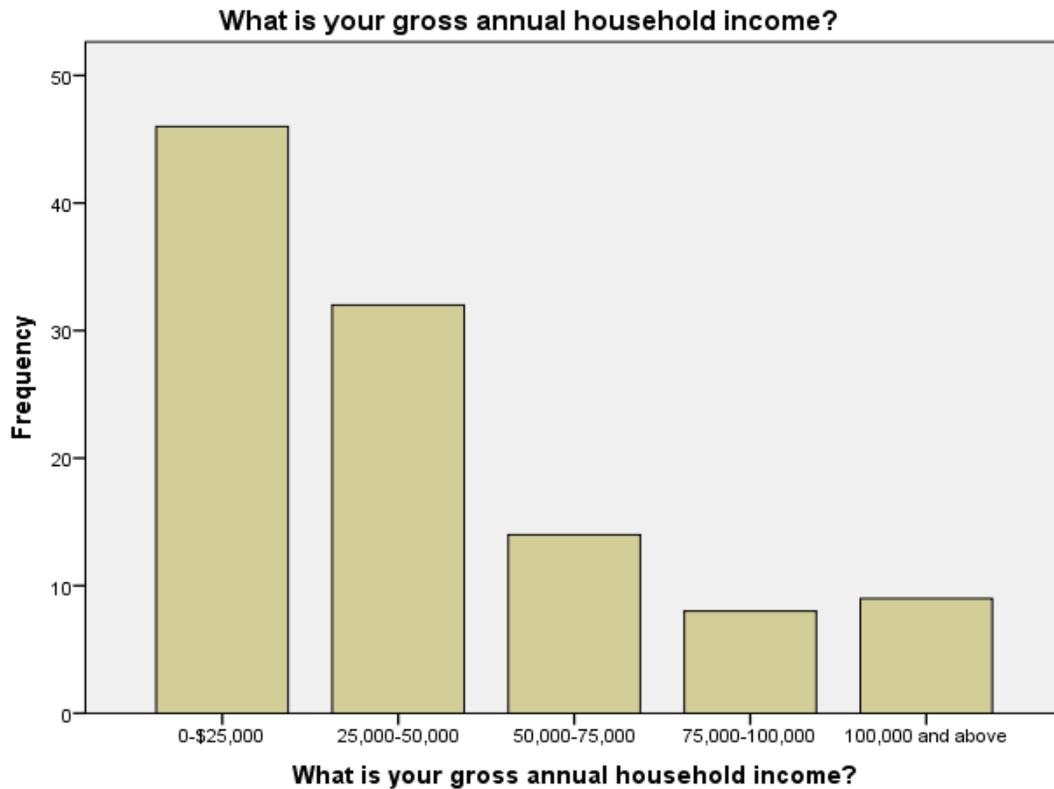


Figure 1. Household Income

In regards to participant's religious preferences, Table 2 displays the breakdown of the participant's religious identification, with almost half identifying as Christian (42.7%). Additionally, 70 participants (63%), stated that they were not an active member of a church or religious group and 38 participants (34.5%) stated that they did belong to a religious group or church.

Table 2. Additional Demographic Information

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency (N)</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
<b>Religions Preference</b>		
Catholic	27	25.5%
Christian	47	42.7%
Jewish	2	1.8%
Seventh Day Adventist	1	1.8%
Other	30	27.3%

### Key Variables

Participants were asked to rate a variety of statements pertaining to their knowledge of equine assisted psychotherapy, openness to conduct therapy with animals and/or outside a traditional clinic setting and current or past experiences with companion animals. The participants were asked to rate their belief of the several statements on a scale that included Strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, neutral, somewhat disagree, disagree and strongly disagree. The participants were also asked questions that required a yes or no answer, such as owning a pet or caring for an animal.

### Sentiment and Experience with Animals: Participant Standpoint

When participants were asked about owning a companion animal (pet) over half of the population, 67 (60.9%) said they did own or care for a pet (see

figure 2.) In regards to fear of animals, less than 10% of the sample population agreed with being fearful of animals. The vast majority of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that animals and humans share an unspoken connection. A large number of participants stated that enjoy being around animals, 81(72.8%) and 99 participants (89.7%) reported having a pet as a child.

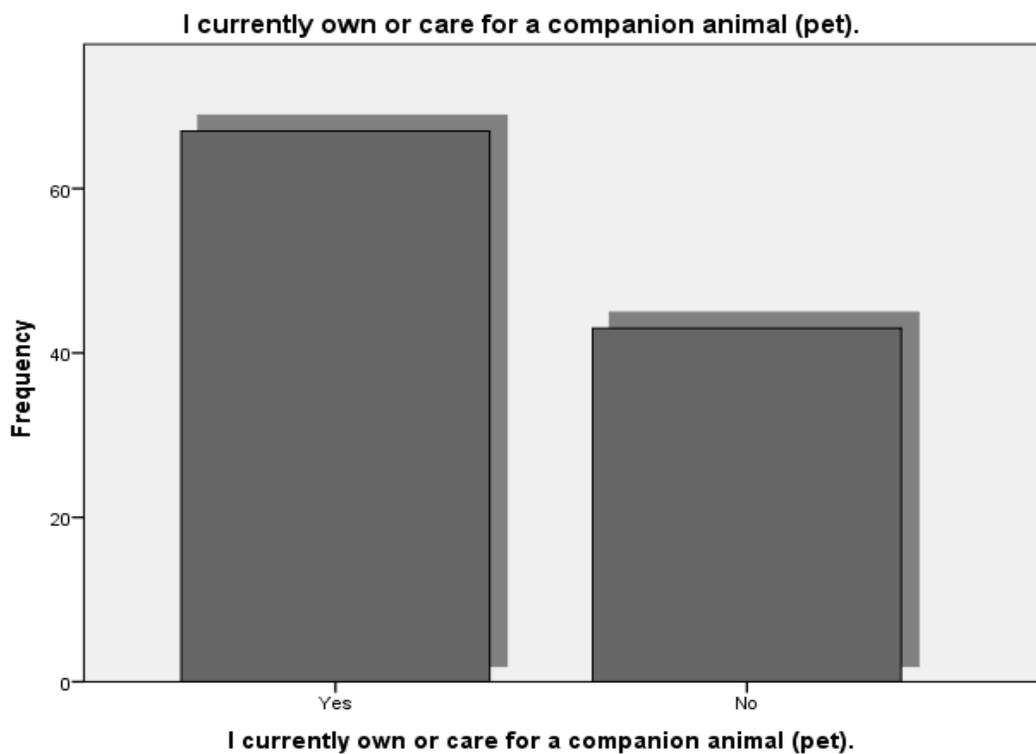


Figure 2. Ownership of Companion Animal (pet)

### Willingness to Use Animals in Treatment: Participant Standpoint

Over half of the participants, 73 (66.4%), stated that they had heard of equine assisted psychotherapy treatment. Thus, 36 (32.7%) of participants have

not ever heard of this type of therapy. The vast majority of the participants 103 (93.6%) believe that animals can be beneficial when used in therapy, however very few know a social worker or therapist that utilizes animals in their practice, 33(30%) (see Table 3.).

Table 3. Significant Variables

<b><i>The use of animals in therapy</i></b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I am willing to utilize alternative therapeutic methods with my clients	62 (56.4%)	33 (30%)	10 (9.1%)	4 (4.5%)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
I enjoy being around animals	57 (51.8%)	24 (21%)	14 (12%)	0.0%	1 (0.9%)	2 (1.8%)	2 (1.8%)
I am fearful of animals.	1 (0.9%)	0	7 (6.4%)	5 (4.5%)	12 (10.9%)	29 (29.4%)	56 (50.9%)
I am familiar with the therapeutic use of horses to treat mental, behavioral and emotional disorders	34 (30.9%)	28 (25.5%)	16 (4.5%)	10 (9.1%)	3 (2.7%)	12 (10.9%)	7 (6.4%)
I believe animals and humans share an unspoken connection	46 (41.8%)	44 (40%)	11 (10%)	8 (7.3%)	1 (0.9%)	0.0%	0.0%
I would be open to the use of animals in with my clients	67 (60.9%)	31 (28.2%)	10 (9.1%)	2 (1.8%)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
I know a social worker that utilizes animals in their practice	21 (19.1%)	12 (10.9%)	4 (3.6%)	18 (16.4%)	2 (1.8%)	32 (29.1%)	21 (19.1%)
I had a pet as a child	70(63.3%)	29(26.4%)	3 (2.7%)	1 (0.9%)	0.0%	2 (1.8%)	5 (4.5%)

## Data Interpretation

The hypothesis for this study is that social workers who have experience in caring for and owning animals and knowledge of equine assisted psychotherapy, will have a positive perception of equine assisted psychotherapy and thus be more willing to utilize animals in treatment. The first two variables to consider are, a participant's openness to the therapeutic use of animals with clients and their reported enjoyment of animals.

For this study a Sig.(2-tailed) value of less than .05 indicates that the variables have a statistically significant correlation. The variables were found to be statistically significant given the Sig.(2-tailed) value of .001. The Pearson correlation for the participant's willingness to use animals in treatment and enjoyment of animals, is 0.320. This indicates these variables are positively correlated, however there is a weak relationship between the two variables.

This researcher believed that there would be a significant relationship between willingness to use animals in treatment and having prior knowledge of equine assisted psychotherapy. The data collected from the participants indicates otherwise. The Sig.(tailed-2) value for these two variables is 0.024 and Pearson correlation 0.216. This points to a very weak, albeit significant, relationship between having knowledge of equine assisted psychotherapy and a willingness to use animals in treatment.

An additional variable predicted by this researcher to be positively correlated to a willingness to use animals in treatment, was having owned a pet.

Conversely, this was not indicated in the data collected for this study. The Sig.(2-tailed) value was 0.298 demonstrating that these variables are not statistically significant. Meaning that those participants that had owned or own a pet, are no more likely to be willing to use animals in treatment than those who did not own a pet.

Expectedly, the participants that held the belief that the use of animals in the recovery process was beneficial to client's suffering from mental health issues, were more willing and open to the idea of using animals in treatment. This was demonstrated with a Pearson correlation of 0.516 and a Sig. (2-tailed) value of .000. This shows that these variables have strong positive relationship and are significantly correlated.

The data collected from this study shows that most the variables have statistically significant correlations, although these correlations are fairly weak. Therefore, the hypothesis is partially supported as three of the four tests had significant correlations, albeit weak. There are limitations of the study should be considered, such as small sample size and participant bias, that could have contributed to the weak correlations. There is a relationship with several variables tested, however, it is possible that other factors explain the participants' willingness or understanding of equine assisted therapy than the variables tested in this study.

## Implications of Findings for Micro Practice

This study's foremost implication for micro practice is that more research is needed to explore the factors that influence a social worker's use of animals in treatment. This study's results render that social workers are very open to using animals in treatment, however, a small percentage of the sample population actually know a social worker that utilizes animals in their practice. Additional research is needed to identify barriers to including animals in practice. A great deal of research indicates the effectiveness of a therapeutic use of animals in treatment. This sentiment towards the therapeutic use of animals is mirrored in this study, as the clear majority of participants believe animals can be an effective therapeutic tool.

A study conducted by Risley-Curtis et al., (2013), identified several features impacting the inclusion of animals in treatment. First, the population being treated was a large influence and those clinicians including animals. For example, those working with elderly were more likely to use animals. An additional factor was, social workers that owned a companion animal were more likely to utilize animals in their practice. This study assessed for a correlation between social worker's willingness to use animals in practice and having owned a pet and reported enjoyment of animals, and they were positively correlated, imitating a similar theory as the study conducted by Risley-Curtis et al. (2013).

## Summary

This chapter provided and analyzed the data that was gathered from the survey. The participant's demographic information was briefly discussed. In addition to key variables and the participant's standpoint on several factors related to the use of animals in treatment and equine assisted psychotherapy. Lastly, the implications for micro practice were presented.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TERMINATION AND FOLLOW UP

#### Introduction

This chapter delivers an overview of the concepts revealed from the data collection. A brief discussion on the limitations of this study will be discussed. In addition to recommendations for future research in relation to this topic.

#### Termination of Study

The participants were thanked for taking the time to participate in the study at the beginning and end of the survey. The participants were informed that they had the discretion to stop their participation in the survey at any time. The researcher will not communicate with the participants after the study is complete. Due to the nature of the study, an electronic anonymous survey, no personal contact information was requested from the participants. Participants were provided the website for Scholar Works, the online data base where the project would be available, should they want to review the results.

#### Communication of Findings and Dissemination Plan

The purpose of this study was to explore factors that impacted a social worker's perception of equine assisted psychotherapy and their willingness to use animals in treatment. The results indicated that an overwhelming amount of participants had positive views of animals and their therapeutic benefit. While this study found many factors correlating to a social worker's willingness to use animals in treatment, those correlations were statistically weak. This researcher

hypothesized that a social worker's willingness to use animals in treatment would be impacted by several factors, having owned a pet, fondness of animals, and knowledge of the therapeutic use of animals. Based on this study there does appear to be a relationship between these variables, but there are likely other factors that predict the use of equine assisted therapy that were not explored in this study.

The findings of this study will be presented in a research project that will be available through the California State University, San Bernardino, Scholar Works data base. There will also be a poster board presented the CSUSB School of Social Work Annual Poster Day.

There are limitations of this study. The participants of the study were undergraduate and graduate level students in Social Work enrolled in a California State University. Due to the limited population sampled, this study should be considered to have a low external validity. There was participant bias in those that chose to complete the survey, other factors used to predict equine assisted psychotherapy such as, comfort, familiarity and experience with horses, were not examined. Additionally, the use of a new instrument was used, rather than one that are previous psychometric properties tested (Morris, 2014). That being said, the results of this study could indicate that more research would need to be gathered to determine what factors do actually impact a social worker's inclination to use equine assisted psychotherapy or animals in treatment.

## Summary

This chapter discussed how the results of this study would be communicated to participants and the dissemination plan. The findings of the study were recapped as were the study's limitations.

APPENDIX A  
DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

The purpose of this study is to examine factors that influence a social worker's willingness to utilize equine assisted psychotherapy. The study should take 10-15 minutes and you may withdrawal at any time. The survey is voluntary and completely anonymous. If you would like to participate in the study, please click in the link below.

What is your age?	22-30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	51-60 years	60 years or above	
What is your gender?	Male	Female	Transgender male-female	Transgender female-male	Intersex	
Which program are you enrolled?	MSW Full-time	MSW Part-time	Pathway	BASW		
What year are you in your program?	2 <sup>nd</sup> year Part-time	3 <sup>rd</sup> year Part-time	2 <sup>nd</sup> year Full time	1 <sup>st</sup> year full time	1 <sup>st</sup> year part	
What is your ethnicity?	White	Other	Hispanic or Latino	Pacific Islander	African American	Native American
What is your annual household income?	\$0-25,000	\$25,000-50,000	\$50,000-75,000	\$75,000-100,000	\$100,000 or above	
What is your religious preference?	Catholic	Other	Protestant	Mormon	Jewish	Seventh day Adventist
Are you a member of a church, synagogue, mosque, or other organized religious group?	Yes	No				

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have heard of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy treatment.					
I think all therapy should be between the therapist and patient.					
I currently own or care for a companion animal (pet).					
I enjoy being around animals.					
I am fearful of animals.					
I am familiar with the therapeutic use of horses to treat mental, emotional and behavioral issues.					
I think all therapy should be between the therapist and patient (s) should be conducted in an office environment.					
I believe that animals and humans share an unspoken connection.					
I had pet (s) as a child.					
I believe animals can be beneficial in the recovery process for people suffering from mental health issues.					
I believe animals can be beneficial in the recovery process for individuals suffering from developmental disorders.					
I am willing to provide alternative therapeutic treatment methods to my clients.					
I believe animals can be beneficial when used in therapy.					
I know another social worker that uses animals in treatment.					

Developed by Melanie Woolen

APPENDIX: B  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM



California State University, San Bernardino  
 Social Work Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee  
 APPROVED 6/22/16 VOID AFTER 6/28/17  
 IRBM 201673 CHAIR

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
 School of Social Work

**INFORMED CONSENT**

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine social worker perceptions of equine assisted psychotherapy. The study is being conducted by Melanie Woolen and supervised by Associate Professor Carolyn McAllister, School of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee, California State University, San Bernardino.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the study is to examine social worker perceptions of equine assisted psychotherapy.

**DESCRIPTION:** Participants will be asked of a several questions in regards to their existing knowledge of equine assisted psychotherapy, their experience with animals and their attitudes and sentiment towards animals.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in the study is totally voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY:** Your responses will remain anonymous and data will be reported in group form only.

**DURATION:** It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey.

**RISKS:** There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

**BENEFITS:** There will not be any direct benefits to the participants.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Associate Professor Carolyn McAllister at 909-537-5559.

**RESULTS:** Please contact for the ScholarWorks database at the John M. Pfu Library at California State University San Bernardino for the results of the study after June 2017.

This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older.

Place an X mark here

Date

909.537.5501 | 909.537.7029

560 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

The California State University, - Bakersfield - Central Valley - Chico - Dominguez Hills - Fullerton - Fresno - Hayward - Long Beach - Los Angeles - Maritime Academy - Northridge - Pomona - Sacramento - San Bernardino - San Diego - San Francisco - San Jose - San Luis Obispo - San Marcos - San Bernardino - Stanislaus

APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT

## INFORMED CONSENT

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RESULTS: Please contact for the ScholarWorks database at the John M. Pfau Library at California State University San Bernardino for the results of the study after June 2017.

This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older.

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Place an X mark here

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Date

APPENDIX D  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

## DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

This study you have just completed was designed to examine social worker perceptions of equine assisted psychotherapy. We are interested in studying what factors affect social worker's willingness to utilize and equine assisted psychotherapy. We are also interested the participants past and current experience with animals and/or companion animal ownership and how this relates to the willingness to use animals in the therapeutic treatment process. This is to inform you that no deception is involved in this study.

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about the study or would like to obtain a copy of the group results, you may access the ScholarWorks database at the John M. Pfau Library at California State University San Bernardino at <http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd/>. The results of this study they will be available after June 2017.

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