

Equine assisted therapy book review examples

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Epistemology is the study of the justifiability of claims in an effort to know more (O'Hanlon & Wilk, 1987). The relationship between epistemology and clinical work is anchored on the language and actions between clients and therapists. The words people use to describe their own actions as well as those of others, their perceptions and experiences are the primary means that therapists use to restore the physical, emotional and the mental health of their clients (O'Hanlon & Wilk, 1987). Therapists use these means to discern and challenge assumptions made when clients seek answers to problems, personalities, symptoms, causes, symptom substitution and the existence of empirical evidence to support different phenomena.

When a person makes an epistemological claim of whatever nature, they presuppose several other statements whose validity they believe in.

According to O'Hanlon & Wilk, (1987), clinical epistemology calls for the client and the therapist to believe in some presuppositions so solve some clinical problems. Both the client and the therapist become actively involved in the epistemological claim during the therapy sessions. Several therapists have recommended for clinical epistemology in the restoration of mental health (O'Hanlon & Wilk, 1987). Clinical epistemology is constituted by examination of what therapists and clients think they know and what they can know with certainty as well as how they can tell whether their knowledge is clinically viable.

Equine Assisted Therapy (EAT) is based on clinical epistemology and is the use of horses in psychotherapy (O'Hanlon & Wilk, 1987). The association of horses with therapy stems from the fact that people tend to act in accordance with the motives and agendas that they attribute to and use to

explain the actions of others and in accordance with their own agendas (Trotter, 2012). Horses have since time immemorial taken a special place in the lives of humanity either in wars, sports or as pets. EAT is borne out of the extrapolation of the close relationship between horses and human beings over hundreds of years.

EAT involves the client and the therapist spending time with a horse in activities such as grooming, walking, feeding and playing games with horses (Trotter, 2012). Over the years, various clinicians around the world have verified the use of horses in counseling and therapy sessions (EAT) as a clinical, credible and effective adjunct to the traditional talk therapy. The book “ Harnessing the power of Equine Assisted Counseling: Adding Animal Assisted Therapy to Your Practice” is a book put together by a team of 28 psychologists, counselors and medical doctors in the area of mental health in order to help change the face of counseling. The book offers insight into how horses can be used to help clients deal with anxiety, traumas, abuse, depression, communication issues and social challenges and other related problems. A chapter from the book by Pat Parelli who is an internationally renowned “ horse whisperer” offers insight from a horse’s perspective demonstrating how to develop a relationship with a selected therapy horse in a safe, positive and respectful manner (Trotter, 2012).

According to Trotter, (2012) when a therapist and his/her mental health client spend time playing, or feeding a horse, the therapist has an opportunity to access the responses of the client to nature through communication and change of emotions. Trotter, (2012) asserts that horses are by nature calm animals and being around them brings about tranquility

and relaxation thereby enabling emotionally disturbed persons to feel at ease and open up issues they might have ‘bottled up’. This way the therapist is in a position to offer counseling accordingly. Moreover, therapists have proved that watching an animal such as a horse feed engrosses the human mind and preoccupies it with pleasantness. Scientists have proved that communication or the expression of one’s feelings (especially traumatic and depressing) by talking effectively eases mental pressure (Trotter, 2012). Though devoid of verbal responses, talking to a horse has been proved to achieve excellent mental relaxation for many a mental patients. The repetition of this activities is what EAT banks on in order to gradually restore mental health.

In order to achieve effective EAT; it is imperative that the therapist and the client start by building a relationship with a selected horse. In the book “How to think Like a Horse” Cherry Hill discusses how people can understand the behavior of horses and use it for the mutual benefits of horses and men. Hill (2006) asserts that human/horse relationships benefit from the human understanding of what makes horses happy, what worries them, what motivates them, and how horses experience the world. In her journey through the equine mind, Hill explores what makes a horse tick. In the first chapter of the book, she poses some questions and introduces the relationship between human beings and horses. Issues in the first two chapters of the book include why think like a horse? What a horse needs, what horses don’t like, how to become part of a horse. Hill (2006) asserts that understanding the senses (vision, touch, smell, taste and reflexes) of a horse- aids to improve communication and the overall relationship with the

horse thereby improving the effectiveness of EAT. In the third chapter, Hill explores the physical parts and systems of a horse. These are the digestive system, skeletal system, hoof growth and the seasonal changes that horses go through. The fourth chapter of the book, discusses the nature of the horse. In this regard, the author explores the pecking order among horses in a family, bonding among horses and human beings, curiosity and investigative behavior among horses.

EAT based on clinical epistemology has proved to be beneficial and the presence of various literature directly or indirectly proves that it is an indispensable method of psychotherapy.

References

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- O'Hanlon, W. H., & Wilk, J. (1987). Shifting contexts: The generation of effective psychotherapy. New York, N. Y: Guilford Press.
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