

RIDING AS A SPORT OF TERAPEUTIC NATURE NARRATIVE STUDY

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Abstract. *The healing effects of horse riding have been known for a long time. These qualities were already recognized in ancient times - Hippocrates believed that riding a horse stimulates the functioning of the body, while Socrates noticed its impact on the exercise of the body and senses. In turn, Avicenna considered horse riding to be an excellent exercise for the body. In the sixteenth century, doctors confirmed the beneficial effects of horse riding, considering it useful for health. In 1750, Francisco Fuller mentioned horse riding in the first study of sports medicine, noticing its impact on the state of mind and human body (Bednarczyk 2015). The horse played a huge role in human life, and the nature of this relationship has changed over the years. The subject of the article focuses on the equestrian sport, which therapeutic effect takes place through the constant dialogue between the rider and the horse. This relationship is manifested in a special relationship of man and animal, which has an emotional character. The phenomenon of this interaction was presented in the Amazon narrative, which through riding and communing with these animals, has found a new dimension of life. The research was embedded in qualitative orientation, which allowed to understand a fragment of the narrator's reality and her experience of everyday life.*

Keywords: horse, horsemanship, therapy.

Introduction

The encounter of man and horse and their common history began many years ago and continues to this day. Paleontologists, who studied wall drawings in the Pech Merle French caves, noticed the silhouettes of horses presented there, which personified the magical power that gave man life energy (Forman & Niederwser, 2002). The evolution of both species is strongly connected with each other, and the significance of this diverse relationship between a horse and a human is evident in many areas of human life (Łojek & Łojek, 2015).

The horse played a huge role in human life and the nature of this relationship has changed over the years. Through cooperation, physical and mental closeness, people began to discover new dimension of this relationship.

Currently, equestrianism can take various forms, from sport at the highest level, through recreation, tourism, para-equestrianism and rehabilitation and therapy (hippotherapy), as one of the types of animal therapy. However, in each of these forms one can notice the unique dialogue that is created between man and

animal. This communication takes place through movement and because of the movement. (Strauß, 2012).

So what is the therapeutic peculiarity of equestrianism? This relationship is manifested in the special communication between man and animal, which is emotional. *The nature of a horse's relationship with a human being lies in the constant state of "tuning." Every interaction, every aspect and nuance of communication between a horse and a man is an element of constant learning and teaching. Human-animal (horse) relationships serve as conscious exercises that help to develop feelings and behaviours that improve quality of life* (Sawaryn, 2008).

It is the cooperation of two entities that, as a result of harmonious synergy, generates the presence of added value (Walulik, 2017), which is the new dimension of human life.

The therapeutic dimension of horse riding

The healing effects of horse riding have been known since antiquity, when Hippocrates noticed the positive impact of horse riding and its universal significance in the treatment of some human diseases. In turn, Socrates wrote about the impact of horse riding on both the body and the senses (Bednarczyk, 2015).

When talking about the therapeutic dimension of horse riding, hippotherapy, i.e. activities aimed at restoring fitness and health, with the participation of a horse, is most often thought of (Strumińska, 2003). This form of therapy has many possibilities, which is why, thanks to diversity, it can be a proposition not only for people with disabilities, but also for all those struggling with difficulties. Due to the versatility of hippotherapy, various activities are distinguished within this therapeutic form. Among the hippotherapy activities are:

- physiotherapy on a horse - therapeutic gymnastics on a horse moving in walk, where properly selected exercises have an impact on improving coordination, balance, orientation in the body schema and space,
- psycho-pedagogical horse riding - individual classes with an emphasized psychodidactic dimension of therapy,
- therapy with a horse - activities based on contact and relationship with the animal during the therapeutic situation,
- horse riding for disabled people - recreation and sport, learning the basics of horse riding and preparation for equestrian competitions (Strumińska, 2003).
- In view of the presented hippotherapeutic procedures, there is talk of the impact of horse riding on various spheres of human functioning.

The first of them - and the most obvious - is the physical sphere, where through the multidimensional rhythm of vibration of a horse walking, it affects the improvement of overall fitness, normalizes muscle tone, improves balance and general condition and reflects the correct gait pattern. But riding a horse affects not only this area.

An important role is played by the horse and riding on it in the functioning of the emotional and motivational sphere (by increasing motivation, increasing self-esteem, emotional changes), the cognitive sphere (by stimulating the reception of sensual sensations, stimulating the development of visual and auditory perception, developing concentration of attention, memory, logical thinking and speech development), and the social sphere (by increasing social activation, establishing and developing positive relationships) (PTHip, 2018).

The therapeutic role of horse riding and communing with a horse is manifested in the search for and creating a bond between man and animal. In addition to the health dimension, equestrianism creates many situations that result in improved functioning and its consequences are positive mental, social and aesthetic changes (Jeczeń, 2009). Contact with an animal affects the development of emotional intelligence, teaches discipline, has an impact on the sense of responsibility and patience.

Equestrianism as a relation of horse and rider

Horse riding is one of the most difficult and demanding forms of activity, because its success is determined by the relationship, communication and harmony between the rider and the horse who become one when working together. According to Waclaw Pruchniewicz, *horse riding is an unusual and very complicated sport, because it depends on the close cooperation of two living beings - man and horse* (Pruchniewicz, 2003). Communication between them consists in transmitting subtle signals that are least noticeable from the outside. This sublime dialogue and agreement between the partners: horse and man, constitute the essence of horse riding. It is said that it is in some sense an elite discipline, which refers to people practicing this discipline who belong to the characterological and personality elite. *Riding a horse, regardless of age, the rider should behave properly towards both the animal and other riders. People riding horses should stand out above all in their determination, responsibility, duty, common sense and good physical fitness* (Balinska & Kowalska, 2011).

Horse and human relations include situations related to ordinary horse-human contact, up to the relationship in which the horse accepts man as his guide, voluntarily surrenders to him, and despite his physical advantage he can serve man faithfully. Such interdependence manifests itself on many levels and enriches the world of sensations that open to a new quality of human life (Strauß, 2012).

There is a reason why equestrian talks about the relationship between a rider and a horse, calling its subjects a "pair", because the success is a partnership of both.

The uniqueness of horse riding is also evidenced by the fact that it can be practiced and competed by people regardless of gender and age. Both a small child and an elderly person can successfully mount a horse. Horse riding is a unique form of sport and recreation that you can do throughout your life. When riding a horse, the rider's age or gender is not important, but his emotional development. Communicating with horses and horse riding is not only doing sports, but also a form of active leisure in close contact with nature. Horse riding connects generations, gathers people who practice amateur riding with sports players, and all those who treat them in an emotional way (Grobelny, 1997).

Despite its elitism, equestrianism is now becoming more and more available and popular. Numerous equestrian centers are created, equipped with a rich infrastructure, equipped with indoor horse riding halls, enabling training in all weather conditions. Guest houses are also being built that have space for private horses. More and more people decide to buy their own horse, because horse riding with time ceases to be just a passion and becomes a lifestyle.

There are two types of motivations that guide people when riding a horse. The first is external motivation, associated with involvement in connection with external pressure, encouragement of other people, or even pressure from parents, which is often associated with the probability of giving up riding. The second type is internal motivation, which stimulates to take action to meet their own needs. People with internal motives are more persistent in pursuing their goals. Among the factors affecting the formation of internal motivation, we can mention:

- the ability to have dreams and turning dreams into goals,
- high self-esteem and sense of self value,
- various interests and passions,
- optimism and emotionality,
- freedom of choice,
- support from the environment (Herzig, 2009; Aronson, 1997).

In order to practice horse riding and achieve results in it, one must thoroughly learn the principles that form the basis for agreement and cooperation between the rider and the horse. This cognition can take place through systematic riding and communing with these animals. Thanks to the process of man-horse bond making man can discover a new dimension of his own life.

Methodological basis of the study

The advantages of contact with animals and their impact on various spheres of human development have been known for a long time. The relationship

between man and horse is manifested in the relationship between them, which is emotional. This interaction was demonstrated in this article by analyzing and interpreting the narrative of the amazon woman who tied her life to these animals. Through regular contact with horses, horse riding and communing with these animals, she found - despite the difficulties she struggled with - a new dimension of life. The research was embedded in qualitative orientation. Thanks to this, it was possible to examine and try to understand a fragment of the narrator's reality and her experience of everyday life.

The study was conducted by using the narrative interview technique, which involved a *free story telling based on recreating the experiences of the respondent's life* (Rubacha, 2008). It was associated with the participation of the research author in the world of the examined person, with understanding and interpretation of his reality in the natural environment, as well as an attempt to give meaning to concepts and terms she used (Flick, 2010).

The essence of the narrative interview is a free, spontaneous story of a life or specific event, which is not disturbed by the intervention of the researcher. While conducting the study, the author focused on specific elements of the interlocutor's life, while the person telling their own story had the opportunity to present it in a preferred way (Gudkowa, 2012).

Research issues were located on the time axis, where three time areas are clearly outlined - past, present and future, which influenced the interpretation of individual components. The continuum data allowed us to look at the changes that took place in the examined person's life.

A child with complexes

She describes her childhood as the most difficult period in her life. Her experience of losing her father, growing up in a housing estate, which was full of all sorts of pathologies, living at home with her mother, who was struggling with loss and regret herself, influenced the feeling of loneliness, otherness and diminishing her own value.

... when I was 5 years old, my father died tragically. I stayed alone with my mother in an empty apartment in the estate. Mom was depressed after losing her husband. I didn't understand it at the time, but now I know it ...

I was afraid to go out into the yard, because a neighbor lived next door, who drank a lot, and made huge quarrels at night. He was chasing after the cage with an ax, and three daughters running away from him and his wife was screaming terribly (...) I was afraid of him, I was even afraid of passing by their door.

These events caused the child's suffering. On the one hand, the traumatic experience in the form of the death of her father, on the other, the experience of

violence and alcoholism in the immediate vicinity, influenced her sense of fear. In addition, the lack of adequate support from the mother, who was struggling with her own difficulties, Childhood experiences and traumas often have an impact on human formation and further development. This situation affected the narrator's life and affected the process of shaping of her self-esteem, brought insecurity and a sense of otherness into her life.

In elementary school I was plump and wore glasses. Typical ugly. I was a kid with complexes. It didn't overflow, so I never had designer clothes. I was the only person in the class who didn't have a father. I felt terrible because I felt different. I was rather introverted and did not believe in myself ... I had only one friend, although some time later our paths diverged. Somehow I couldn't find friends ...

Through her childhood experiences, the subject felt isolated. Difficulties in establishing and maintaining relationships with peers resulted in loneliness and secrecy, the appearance of complexes of external appearance and those associated with low material status, and comparison with others. This was not conducive to the development of a young person. The respondent does not mention relations with the environment, rather focuses on her own unpleasant experiences.

The turning point in the narrator's life was her mother enrolling her in her riding lessons. The narrator describes this event as a significant turn in her life.

When I was 9 years old, my mother enrolled me in a small stable in my town. And I caught the bug. I started coming there more and more often, all the time I was thinking about going to the stable. And I didn't even have to ride. Just being with these animals, helping them prepare for riding, and even cleaning their cages and cleaning them was an amazing experience for me. I don't know how and when it happened, but I got into the life of the stable, helped trainers and met my peers. We had common themes, shared passions and we wanted to be together and talk about horses all the time.

The narrator pointed out the relationship between the emergence of passion and the improvement of social relations. Thanks to new interests, she became more open to contacts with other children, she found a common understanding with them. The horses with whom the relationship and bond she made had an impact on improving the girl's functioning in the social, cognitive and emotional-motivational sphere.

Being with them (horses) gave me a sense of peace, I forgot about everything. Looking into the eyes of the horse, I saw my dreams come true. He made everything I believed and worked on real and good. This stable, horses and these people - this was my place on earth.

When analyzing the narrative, two stages of childhood should be captured. The first filled with loneliness and loss, the second - a turning point - the time to discover passion, create bonds and relationships with animals, which translated into improving relationships with people.

Horses teach human feelings

One of the most important human needs is the need for closeness, belonging, experiencing love and lasting interpersonal relationships. They result from permanent satisfaction of emotional needs, and result in a sense of happiness, fulfillment and success (Firkowska - Mankiewicz, 2002). Interpreting the subject's narrative, it can be seen that the implementation of these needs began in parallel with the formation of bonds with horses. The relationship with animals, in turn, took place in an emotional dimension. Passion turned into a lifestyle where horses play a major role.

I rode and I rode. I trained, there were competitions, competitions, badges. It wasn't a day for me not to be in the stable. I couldn't live without it anymore. In time, I became an instructor and taught others how to work with horses. I learned a lot, a lot has changed in my approach to life. But everything really got even stronger when I bought my first horse.

The development of equestrian passions influenced the further shaping of the narrator's life, which was focused on relations with horses. As she notes, owning a horse has strengthened changes in approach to life.

I have a great horse that proves to me at every turn that what I do is good. Medals and successes are forgotten with time, but a new, better person appears. Relationships remain forever, if we nurture them and try to make them good, no one will be able to take them away from us.

The relationship between the narrator and her horse is emotional. The subject talks about the formation of this relationship, difficult beginnings and about her experiences related to the appearance of this particular animal in her life. This relationship required proper commitment, because it is cooperation with a living being. The subject also mentions meeting with the person who directed this cooperation between the horse and the human being. However, it does not specify who this person is. However, it can be concluded that this meeting was an important moment for the narrator. This is another turning point, this time in the perspective of horse riding and communing with horses, as well as the beginning of building a new dimension of this bond.

When we met, I was very afraid of him. He was unpredictable. Each ride was a struggle for survival and a nightmare. I thought at the time that he was malicious and uncomplicated, that he had no authority, he didn't respect people. You have to break such a horse with a bit and a whip - thinking was very common at that time, but unfortunately it didn't work. Fortunately, a person appeared in our life who showed us the right way. The whole story is incredibly long and multi-threaded, it lasts up to 5 years. It led us to the moment we are now because I know that buying this horse was one of the best decisions I have ever made. There is no more forgiving and patient

animal in this world, it is my greatest success and at the same time the beginning and motivation to fight for dreams.

Creating a relationship between man and horse requires mutual understanding. During its establishment, a person can learn patience, cooperation, perseverance and diligence. He can also learn a lot about himself, which has therapeutic significance in this relationship. Through the connection that developed between her and her horse, the subject could look inside herself, and the lack of faith in her abilities, concealment, loneliness and fear she experienced in her childhood gave way to openness, trust in herself, inner strength. It helped her to understand the world better and gave her more confidence.

I love this horse, I can see how great it is and how old it is. This is amazing, because in his eyes I see myself. I wish everyone could see in my horse's eyes what I see: devotion and understanding. It may sound funny and banal, but it was he who taught me human feelings. Horses are sincere; if they like you they show it, if something doesn't suit them, they manifest it too. There is no pretend, like in some people ...

I am 20 years old and I am grateful to fate and all the people who supported me and helped me to be where I am now. My mother once said that we either win or learn. In retrospect, I can see how much truth there is. I won a new life for myself, I made my dreams come true, I gave myself a chance. I won awareness, awareness of who I really am and what I should do in my life. I won because I changed my whole life thanks to horses.

Analyzing her experience in retrospect, the narrator sees the huge role that horses and equestrian play in her life. The horse, which is a much bigger and stronger partner than a human, thanks to subtle communication and agreement, wants to cooperate with the rider. He cannot be forced to this cooperation but only persuaded. Therefore, horses teach the art of communication. The emotional changes, development and maturity of the narrator were associated with her life path, in which horses appeared and she managed to create a strong relationship with them.

Changes are needed

It is said that variation is the most constant in life. Changes are an integral part of everyone's life. They are associated with leaving the so-called comfort zone, cause stress and fears. However, they are necessary because they affect the formation and development of man. The narrator sees this need for change, which is often associated with incurring costs.

... one should not be afraid of changes, they are needed in life, they can be hard, but in my case the change in the environment allowed me to free myself from many stresses and I understood that sometimes it is worth doing something for myself ...

Analyzing the narrative, it can be seen that one change in the subject's life entails another. The only constant element is the presence of horses in her life. It is the relationship with them that drives her to actions and changes. The narrator also associates her future with horses and equestrianism. As you can see, this is a very important bond for her.

As for the rest of things that have changed, I am starting my studies at the University of Agriculture, majoring in Zootechnics. Public policy turned out to be not for me. This is quite a big step and I hope that I will learn many interesting and useful things. The change of studies is directly related to the fact that from February I plan to start a course of horse physiotherapy. In a word, change in full swing.

Making significant changes in everyone's life is possible when you want to make your dreams come true and you believe in your own abilities. The narrator develops her interests, achieves goals and accomplishes her goals. The drive and motivation for this is the unique relationship that has been established between her and the horses. A special desire to contact them encourages the respondent to act on her own development. Difficult childhood, overload with negative emotions, fears and anxiety, complexes did not prevent her from achieving success in life.

Conclusions

Riding is a special sport because it involves the relationship between a horse and a man who become a cooperative couple. This cooperation manifests itself in subtle communication between entities, which is expressed through movement. The resulting bond between man and animal is emotional.

The healing and therapeutic effects of horse riding have been known since ancient times. Currently, the horse is appreciated as the subject of hippotherapy, where thanks to riding on it and interacting with it, it is possible to improve the functioning of people in terms of physical, emotional - motivational, cognitive and social way.

The emotional dimension of horse riding means that ordinary passion becomes a lifestyle. The relationship between man and animal requires mutual understanding, and during its development a person can learn a lot about themselves, which plays a huge therapeutic role. Communing with an animal helps us to better understand ourselves and the surrounding world. Teaches sensitivity, patience and diligence. It gives a new meaning to life and allows you to believe in yourself and helps you deal with your own weaknesses and complexes.

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