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Performance Anxiety in Equestrian Sport

A Qualitative Study of How Norwegian Mounted Games
Riders Experience and Cope with Performance Anxiety, and
How They Experience Their Anxiety Affecting the Horse and
Vice Versa

Abstract

Background: Equestrian sports hinge on the collaboration between horse and rider. As horses are sensitive prey animals with their own will and motivation (Williams, 2004), the rider's role is to guide, cooperate, and communicate effectively with the horse. Competitive settings often induce horses' (O'Callaghan, 2015, p. 12) and athletes' stress and anxiety, which has been proven to impact performance (Potter, 1996, s. 85). Mounted games, known for its high-speed and technical demands, poses physical and mental challenges for both riders and horses. Errors resulting from performance anxiety can be catastrophic, as it increases the potential for severe injuries and accidents.

Objective: This study aims to investigate the experience of performance anxiety and coping strategies among Norwegian national team riders in Mounted games, as well as whether they perceive their anxiety to influence the horse, and whether the horse's behavior reciprocally affects the riders' anxiety.

Method: Semi-structured retrospective interviews were conducted with six Norwegian national team riders in Mounted games. Reflexive thematic analysis was employed to examine the findings.

Findings: Based on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress theory, riders displayed varying levels of stress, anxiety, and fear, with individual differences in stressors, symptoms, and interpretations. Some experienced pronounced performance anxiety, while others had generally lower anxiety levels. Championships and finals appeared to be anxiety-inducing situations, with concerns over potential consequences as central. The influence of riders' anxiety on their horses and vice versa was a topic of some uncertainty and disagreement, although evidence suggests a mutual anxiety influence between horse and rider. National team riders employed a wide range of coping strategies, including mental techniques and physical preparations, with experience and effective communication playing vital roles in managing competitive situations. Teams were also identified as both a stressor, and a coping mechanism through social support.

Conclusion: The results highlight the need for increased awareness concerning personal arousal and anxiety levels and the interplay of anxiety between the rider and the horse. They also emphasize the effective utilization of coping strategies.

Keywords: Performance anxiety, stress, fright, equestrian sport, horse-rider-relationship, team-performance, coping

Sammendrag

Bakgrunn: Ridning er en idrett som avhenger av samarbeidet mellom hest og rytter. Ettersom hesten er et fluktdyr, med egen vilje og motivasjon (Williams, 2004), blir rytterens oppgave å styre, samarbeide og kommunisere med hesten på best mulig måte. Konkurransesituasjonen er som kjent ofte stress- og angstfremkallende for ryttere, men også hester (O'Callaghan, 2015, p. 12). Dette kan gi uhendige konsekvenser for prestasjonen (Potter, 1996, s. 85). Mounted games er en disiplin som setter mange krav til ryttere og hester både fysisk og mentalt, med høy fart og tekniske øvelser. Dette øker potensialet for alvorlige skader og ulykker, der feil som følge av prestasjonsangst kan bli katastrofale.

Formål: Denne studien har som hensikt å undersøke opplevelsen av prestasjonsangst og mestringsstrategier blant landslageryttere i Mounted games, samt hvorvidt de opplever at deres angst påvirker hesten, og om hestens atferd motsatt påvirker rytternes angst.

Metode: Det ble gjennomført semi-strukturerte retrospektive intervjuer med seks norske landslagsryttere i Mounted games. Refleksiv tematisk analyse ble benyttet for analyse.

Funn: Med utgangspunkt i Lazarus og Folkman's (1984) stressteori opplevde de fleste rytterne tidvis stress, angst og frykt, men det var store individuelle variasjoner i form av stressorer, symptomer, og tolkninger. Noen opplevde høyere prestasjonsangst og i større grad mer plagsomt, der andre generelt opplevde lavere angst. Mesterskap og finaler virket å være spesifikke angst-økende situasjoner, og frykten for å konsekvenser var en sentral bekymring. Det var noe usikkerhet og uenighet tilknyttet rytterens påvirkning på hesten og hestens påvirkning på rytteren, men mye tyder på at det er en gjensidig påvirkning av angst mellom hest og rytter. Landslagsrytterne brukte også et bredt spekter av mestringsstrategier, deriblant mentale teknikker og fysiske forberedelser, hvor erfaring og kommunikasjon virker å være sentralt for effektiv håndtering av konkurransesituasjonen. Laget ble også identifisert som både en stressor, og mestringsstrategi gjennom sosial støtte.

Konklusjon: Funnene øker behovet for bevissthet rundt eget angst- og spenningsnivå og angstens påvirkning på og av hesten. Funnene fremhever også effektiv bruk av mestringsstrategier.

Nøkkelord: Prestasjonsangst, stress, frykt, ridning, rytter-hest-relasjonen, stressmestring, lagprestasjon

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Abbreviations

AGT   Achievement Goal Theory

MG   Mounted games

TTSC   Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping

WC   World Championship

Forord

Denne masteroppgaven markerer en overgang til et nytt kapittel i livet, da studietiden på Norges Idrettshøgskole går mot en foreløpig slutt. Årene på NIH har vært svært lærerike og spennende. De har tidvis vært utfordrende, men jeg har opplevd vell så mange oppturer og gleder underveis også.

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Son, oktober 2023
Kristine Gjulem

Forord

1.0 Introduction

"Well, I'm rarely the type to say that I'm going to win. And I don't really focus much on the placement. But in the individual National Championship, I became very much like, 'Oh, I want to win,' and I had won every competition up until that point that year. And many people came up to me like, 'Now you're going to win, Trude,'... It was, well, the most amateur mindset ever, in my world at least. Because, in my mind, everything went completely haywire. Well, I don't know if it was nervousness, but it was the seriousness in a way. Which was totally, completely unnecessary... I've had many times when people say things like, 'Oh, you're going to win this,' but I haven't really believed it or thought much about it, but that time I just added to it like, 'Yes, I have to win this.' And it just became way too much, you know... But I guess there are many who feel that way, who are very focused on the placement." – Trude, interviewee.

As articulated by Trude, the pressure of winning can be all-consuming. Athletes' minds often function as a dual-edged sword – their fiercest adversary and most potent asset. Navigating high-pressure scenarios is already a daunting task for athletes, and when coupled with managing a horse, the challenge amplifies significantly. Trude illustrates a dynamic interaction between the environment and interpretations, and how in this case, her interpretations are influenced by external feedback, such as what others tell her, leading to a negative perception. This in turn increases Trude's performance anxiety.

The demands of Mounted games (MG) vividly highlight the rigorous expectations placed on riders. Galloping at speeds of 30-65 kph (Sorli, 2000, p. 59; Wolframm & Micklewright, 2011, p. 190), navigating solid obstacles, picking up objects while on horseback, and jumping on and off the horse in speed, all within an arena featuring multiple horses. The consequences of even minor errors, such as mistimed cues or incorrect aids can be catastrophic - leading to falls, collisions with others, and potential injuries to riders and horses. Athletes' performance failures are often attributed to their incapacity to manage stress (Lazarus, 2000, p. 242). Trude's vivid depiction of stress highlights its significant emotional impact. With this, equestrian athletes also have a greater responsibility than other athletes – considering they have to control their emotions and their horses'. As Trude's statement indicates, the competitive equestrian setting is an inherently intricate and complex emotional process.

1.1 Stress and Anxiety in Sport

Stress has become a popular field of research, with multiple theorists and perspectives contributing to the area (e.g., Eriksen et al., 2005; Jones, 1995; Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTSC) is employed as the theoretical framework in this thesis. This perspective is widely used in sports research (e.g., Nicholls & Polman, 2007) because it provides valuable insight into how stress and anxiety progress. It was, therefore, considered suitable to describe how high demands impact elite equestrian riders and how situations can be interpreted differently based on personal and situational factors.

1.1.1 Stress as a Concept – A Brief Introduction

Selye (1976) initially proposed a division of stress into eustress and distress. Eustress represents a constructive form, associated with positive striving and empathetic concerns for others, whereas distress is the destructive type that harms a person's well-being, often linked to feelings of anger and aggression (Selye, 1976, p. 15; Selye, 1978, p. 74). However, Lazarus (1999) notes that this conceptualization lacks robust empirical backing, deeming it controversial and imprecise (p. 32). Despite limited support, Selye hinted that stress might not be inherently harmful.

Research on athletes has revealed that stress can be perceived differently by individuals. Some find stress and anxiety uncomfortable and detrimental to performance, while others view it positively as a satisfying and desirable factor (Hanin, 2010, p. 160; Otten, 2009). As such, it can lead to either reduced or increased motivation, self-confidence, information processing, concentration, judgment, as well as coordination changes (Carver & Scheier, 1988, p. 21; Morris et al., 1981, p. 552). Hanton and colleagues further suggest the importance of considering the direction of anxiety. Directional interpretation involves athletes' perceptions of experienced anxiety symptoms as either facilitative (positive) or debilitative (negative) for performance (e.g., Hanton et al., 2004; 2008; Jones, 1995, p. 462; Jones & Hanton, 2001, p. 385). Ursin and Eriksen (2004) argue that the perception of stress hinges on individual evaluations of stressors and situations, informed by past experiences, outcome expectations (p. 570), and trait anxiety (Potter, 1996, p. 15). According to Potter (1996, p. 14), Spielberger (1989) regarded psychological stress as a multifaceted psychobiological process, breaking it

down into three primary components. Initially, an individual encounters a stressor. Following this, the individual's perception and evaluation of the stressor come into play, and if it is perceived as threatening, it activates an anxiety response. To substantiate this view, Lazarus and Folkman classify anxiety as a stress reaction (Lazarus, 1999, p. 58). In summary, this contributes to the understanding that stress is a complex process shaped by individual interpretation.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) adopted a relational mode of thought, building upon Lazarus's earlier groundwork (1966), placing substantial emphasis on the personal assessment of circumstances within the transactional theory of stress response. They held the conviction that when an individual evaluates a situation as menacing or demanding, it prompts the instigation of coping mechanisms. Lazarus went to the extent of designating the appraisal process as «the theoretical heart of psychological stress, and the emotions too» (p. 61). Potter (1996, p. 14) highlights that both Spielberger (1989) and Lazarus (1966; 1990) emphasized an interactionist perspective, wherein stress is conceived as a dynamic and evolving phenomenon within the context of an individual-environment interplay. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) assert that their perspective on emotion holds a more distinct cognitive nature compared to prior formulations like those by Mandler and Schachter. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) propose that an individual brings along a framework of values, beliefs, goals, and commitments, thereby rendering them more attuned to specific facets of a situation, effectively "setting the stage for an emotion" (p. 264). How the individual construes the situation significantly influences both the emotional and arousal responses (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 266). The theorists mentioned above present many of the same ideas about stress as Lazarus and Folkman, with these further focusing on how emotions, as stress responses, provide a more nuanced picture. This study focuses primarily on anxiety as a stress response.

Performance anxiety has become one of the largest research areas within sports psychology, and the relationship between anxiety and performance is one of the most extensively explored topics (e.g., Hanton et al., 2008; Woodman & Hardy, 2003). Anxiety is considered a negative emotional state associated with nervousness, worries, fears, or bodily tension (Spielberger, 1966, p. 17). Performance anxiety refers explicitly to negative responses to competitive stressors (Mellalieu et al., 2006a, p. 3).

1.2 Mounted games

Equestrianism is a collective term for various disciplines within equestrian sports, including Mounted games, dressage, show jumping, and eventing. Mounted games is a relay-based sport that includes a variety of technical and speed-oriented exercises. It is primarily considered a team sport, but there are also individual and pair competitions (Norges Rytterforbund, n.d). The extent to which competitive success is attributed to the rider, the horse, or the effective functioning of the dyad (the horse-rider relationship) is lacking research (McGreevy & McLean, 2007). Hence, it should also be considered whether poor performance due to anxiety is attributed to the horse, rider, or both.

In line with other sports, an athlete's evaluation of the demands within a competitive context is likely to influence cognitive and physiological arousal and coping strategies. However, what sets equestrian riders apart is that this process also involves assessing their horses' ability to manage the competitive situation (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2010, p. 28; Sorli, 2000, p. 59). In equestrianism, the horse and rider must collaborate and function as a team (Pretty & Bridgeman, 2006, p. 570; Wolframm & Micklewright, 2009, p. 153; McGreevy, 2007, p. 492), much like the relationship in other dyadic sports like double sculling, tennis (doubles), pair skating (Potter, 1996, p. 4), and beach volleyball, demanding trust, harmony, and respect (Coles, 1987, p. 20). In equestrian sport, humans perceive the quality of the human-horse relationship as crucial for both performance and welfare (Tufton et al., 2023). This relationship is fundamental to establishing an efficient and prosperous partnership (Tufton et al., 2023). As communication between horse and rider occurs without speaking the same language, hearing or seeing the same (McBane, 2012), it becomes essential to view the horse as a performance variable and comprehend the horse's mental challenges on an equal footing with the rider's (O'Callaghan, 2015, p. 11; Mellor et al., 2020). This study will investigate how riders on the national team perceive their horses' behavior to affect their anxiety and vice versa.

1.2.1 Equestrianism and Anxiety

Unlike other sports where anxiety might primarily lead to a decline in performance, the ramifications of rider anxiety in equestrian sports are notably more severe - taking into account that it affects communication with the horse while also considering that the

high speed and power make accidents fatal with little room for error. In MG, riders must maintain a heightened state of vigilance and rapid responsiveness throughout the entirety of the competition, reacting instantaneously to the horse's every movement. Consequently, any diminishment in the rider's capacity for sustained attention will likely undermine their performance potential (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2011, p. 190).

From the rider's perspective, undesirable horse behavior often stems from the horse's inherent nature and its natural behavioral patterns (Hothersall and Casey, 2012; Williams, 2004). Equines are inherently flight animals and one of the most perceptive domestic animals, making them exceptionally vigilant about their surroundings, resulting in the potential to feel nervous and react swiftly (O'Callaghan, 2015, p. 12; Williams, 2004). Along with horses possessing their own will and motivations, equestrianism stands out as one of the more dangerous sports (Sorli, 2000, p. 60). Horses are creatures of habit, implying that, much like humans, they can encounter anxiety when placed in unfamiliar surroundings, but as herd animals, they are also hierarchically dominated if done correctly (Williams, 2004). In competitive scenarios, horses must override their innate instincts, block out competing stimuli, and place their trust in the rider. Simultaneously, riders must retain the horse's unwavering focus to execute the tasks demanded within the performance context (O'Callaghan, 2015, p. 12; Potter, 1996, p. 56; Tufton et al., 2023, p. 1). Consequently, equestrians face the complex challenge of managing anxiety levels for themselves and their equine partners. Hence, as a rider, comprehending the horse's nature becomes pivotal, alongside recognizing the paramount role of the trust between horse and rider. A robust horse-rider trust dynamic enables the horse to yield to the rider's guidance and believe in the rider's ability to ensure their safety (O'Callaghan, 2015, p. 12; Potter, 1996, p. 56; Tufton et al., 2023, p. 1).

Research in the field of equestrian sport consistently emphasizes that high levels of anxiety (along with low self-confidence) can lead to reduced performance, suggesting that riders maintaining lower levels of anxiety is advantageous (e.g., Jarvis, 2014; McGreevy, 2007; Morgan, 2014; O'Callaghan, 2015, p. 12; Potter, 1996; Trotter & Endler, 1999; Wolframm & Micklewright, 2009, 2010, 2011). Building upon this, Wolframm and Micklewright (2009) provide evidence that elite equestrian riders

possess a distinct advantage due to their lower somatic arousal and increased self-confidence, enhancing their communication with horses. Furthermore, Bridgeman (2009) highlights that anxiety tends to be more pronounced during competitions compared to training (p. 11). Heightened somatic arousal or anxiety has the potential to disrupt the intricate motor control necessary for executing complex exercises. This premise is rooted in the fact that effective interaction with a horse necessitates high precision and accuracy (Oxendine, 1970, p. 30), involving the coordinated use of seat, leg, weight, and rein aids. The physiological manifestations of somatic arousal encompass increased muscle tension and accelerated respiratory and heart rates. These changes can impact a rider's non-verbal cues to which their horse might be attuned (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2009, p. 156). Thus the literature illustrates that a nervous rider can lead to changes in the rider's technique and inaccurate signals to the horse. What needs more research is evaluations of horses and riders at the same time (Bridgeman 2009, p. 103; Hogg & Hodgins, 2021, p. 1), and whether the rider's anxiety transfers to the horse and vice versa.

In summary, equestrian sports, particularly MG, pose unique challenges. Riders must cooperate with horses, which have their own instincts and needs, all while managing their own emotions. The next section delves deeper into the theoretical framework.

2.0 Theoretical Frame of Reference

It is clear that stress and anxiety levels play significant roles in equestrian sports. Emphasizing individuals' interpretations of situations, Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTSC) can help comprehend how the number and intensity of demands influence their emotions and coping strategies. This chapter provides an explanation of the theory, supplemented with relevant references.

2.1 Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping

Stress is characterized by the interaction between an individual and their environment, arising when perceived demands surpass the individual's psychological resources to effectively manage those demands within a given situation (Lazarus, 1999, p. 58). This aligns with Trude's experience at the beginning of the introduction. Consequently, the experience of stress is contingent upon the individual's assessment, vulnerability, and

capacity to withstand the pressures of the given circumstances (Lazarus, 1999, p. 58). In everyday, well-functioning individuals, vulnerability denotes a deficiency in resources when that deficit pertains to something significant (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 51). A fundamental prerequisite of stress is that it necessitates the individual's concern, as the situation threatens and jeopardizes valued objectives and deeply cherished expectations (Lazarus, 1999, p. 60). Using the example of a youth equestrian rider, if the participation in the sport feels coerced by the parents and the rider has little personal interest, stress is less likely to occur if the participation is perceived as irrelevant to the person. When the demands significantly outweigh the individual's available resources, trauma can occur, inducing a sense of helplessness and often accompanied by feelings of panic and despondency (Lazarus, 1999, p. 58).

2.1.1 Primary Appraisal

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) distinguish between primary and secondary appraisal. In primary appraisal, the focus centers on what is at stake. They elaborate that, depending on the situation, an individual can evaluate an encounter as (1) irrelevant, (2) benign-positive, or (3) stressful (p. 31). An athlete is likely to deem a situation irrelevant if they have no investment in the potential outcome, perceive nothing to be gained or lost from the scenario, and believe it holds no impact on their well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 32; Lazarus, 1999, p. 75). When an athlete interprets an interaction with the environment as positive and conducive to their well-being, benign-positive appraisals come into play. These appraisals often encompass emotions such as joy, happiness, love, peacefulness, or exhilaration. However, depending on individual factors and context, they might also elicit feelings of guilt or anxiety (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 32; Lazarus, 1999, p. 75). Within the framework of stressful appraisal, Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 32) differentiate between harm/loss, threat, and challenge. The individual's perception of the situation profoundly influences their coping strategies, as well as psychophysiological and performance outcomes (Lazarus, 1999, p. 33). In harm/loss, the individual has already incurred some form of damage. In comparison, threat places more emphasis on potential harm and is characterized by negative emotions such as anger, fear, and anxiety. Challenge, in contrast, centers on the potential for growth or gain, eliciting pleasurable emotions like excitement, eagerness, and exhilaration (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, pp. 32-33).

Lazarus (1999, p. 33) further elaborates that a challenge appraisal indicates that the forthcoming difficulties can be surmounted with self-confidence, persistence, and enthusiasm. As such, the concept of challenge carries significant implications for adaptation. Studies on Olympic champions show that challenge-appraisals are one of their main coping strategies (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). In contrast, threat appraisal can lead to increased emotional distress, diminished self-confidence, and greater difficulty in accessing available resources. This often results in lower morale (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, pp. 32-34). While threat and challenge appraisals remain distinct but often intertwined constructs, they can coexist simultaneously and are thus not mutually exclusive. Additionally, these appraisals can evolve over time (p. 33). Threat appraisals are positively related to emotion-focused and avoidance coping, while negatively related to problem-focused coping (Dias et al., 2012), and challenge appraisals relate to adaptive outcomes with potential facilitative interpretations (Didymus & Jones, 2021, p. 66). Williams and Cumming (2012) found threat appraisals to be associated with less perceived control than challenge appraisals.

In their 1987 publication, Lazarus and Folkman introduced the concept of benefit appraisals. These appraisals entail the experience of enduring positive emotions both in the immediate aftermath of an event and over the long term (Nicholls & Polman, 2007, p. 12). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1987), determining whether a situation is harmful or advantageous is influenced by a combination of social and cultural circumstances and individual psychological traits (p. 145). How benefit and harm/loss appraisals influence well-being and performance, lacks scientific attention, along with how appraisals change over time (Didymus & Jones, p. 66).

2.1.2 Secondary Appraisals

Secondary appraisals center on coping strategies, control over stressors, and the assessment of potential actions. This phase involves a multifaceted evaluative procedure that deliberates on available coping alternatives, their likelihood of yielding the desired result, and the associated implications (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 35; Lazarus, 1999, p. 76). The intricate interplay between primary and secondary appraisal is instrumental in determining the magnitude of stress experienced and the nature of the emotional response (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 35). These appraisals operate independently in terms of timing (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 31; 1987, p. 147; Folkman & Lazarus,

1985, p. 152), while also being interdependent; likely influencing each other, and therefore not strictly separate processes (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 43). Appraisals can sometimes unfold unconsciously, rendering individuals unaware of certain or all assessments or even the fact that an appraisal has taken place (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 52).

A rider with a sense of control is likely to undergo challenge appraisals, albeit when the endeavor demands significant exertion, given that "the joy of challenge is that one pits oneself against the odds" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 36). Conversely, a rider grappling with feelings of helplessness in the face of demands is more prone to experiencing elevated stress levels, particularly when confronted with high stakes and a sensation of having everything to lose. Under such circumstances, the sense of helplessness can potentially have a devastating impact (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 35).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 38) delve into the concept of reappraisal, which pertains to how initial appraisals are altered in response to new information from either the individual or the environment. In the 1960s, Lazarus, in collaboration with colleagues, conducted a comprehensive series of studies probing cognitive appraisal. These studies demonstrated that the levels of stress response were indeed influenced by cognitive appraisal processes (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 38). Furthermore, they identified contextual factors and personality traits that influenced the extent of this mediation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 40). The determination of appraisals based on situational and personal factors is recognized as inherently interdependent (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 55).

2.1.3 Personal Factors Influencing Appraisal

Personal attributes that shape appraisals are *commitments* and *beliefs* (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 55). Lazarus (1999, pp. 70-72) further introduces the dimensions of *goals and goal hierarchies*, *beliefs concerning oneself and the world*, and *personal resources* (Table 1).

Table 1

Personal Factors Influencing Appraisal

Factor	Explanation
Commitments	Decisions individuals make in pursuit of their objectives or the preservation of their values. It essentially reflects what holds significance for them.
Beliefs	Individual interpretations of reality, shaping the way individuals perceive their environment. Related to personal control, an individual's conviction in their ability to exert control over situations can lead to the emergence of challenge appraisals.
Goals and goal hierarchies	A goal at stake and motivation for an outcome is crucial to experience stress and emotions. Positive emotions transpire when a feeling of progress arise, and in the opposite case, negative emotions transpire when a feeling of goal thwarting or delay arise. People are often driven more than one goal, and potentially being in conflict with each other. Therefore, there is a need to rank the goals from most to least important
Beliefs about self and world	How we perceive ourselves and our position in the world, shaping our expectations.
Personal resources	Personal variables making us able or unable to do what we wish, often innate or acquired through sustained effort with the potential to become personality traits.

Note. Based on Lazarus and Folkman (1984, pp. 55–67) and Lazarus (1999, p. 70-72).

When an interaction with the environment aligns with a strong commitment, the situation is regarded as meaningful. For instance, a rider with a passion for equestrian sport and winning will perceive competitions as significant, whereas another athlete participating solely due to parental pressure might not assign the same importance to a competition. In these scenarios, commitments influence appraisal by guiding athletes toward or away from situations that could be beneficial, challenging, or threatening to them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 56). Commitments also exert an impact on appraisals through for example vulnerability. Vulnerability denotes a predisposition to react to events with stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 51). As articulated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), "the greater the strength of a commitment, the more vulnerable the person is to psychological stress in the area of that commitment" (p. 58). Thus, these predictions will render a rider profoundly dedicated to winning – more susceptible to stress in high-pressure situations.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 65) delve into the aspect of beliefs related to personal control, and one's perspective on their ability to influence events and outcomes. This notion is often aligned with Rotter's (1966) conceptualization of the external and internal locus of control. External locus of control involves the belief that one's personal actions wield minimal influence over events, with chance, luck, powerful external factors, or fate being more determinant factors. Conversely, internal locus of control reflects the conviction that one's own behavior shapes the course of events (Lazarus &

Folkman, 1984, p. 66). Interacting with a horse inherently involves certain uncertainties regarding the rider's control, as horses can become startled, easily spooked, and possess their own will. Some riders may perceive their horse as an external locus of control in this context. However, elite riders generally possess the skills and experience necessary to manage their horse, leading to an internal locus of control. Knowing the horse and how it reacts, often through time and shared experience, can further enhance this internal locus of control.

Regarding the impact of personal factors on appraisals, individual variances play a significant role in shaping how individuals perceive stressful situations. Consequently, appraisals might not consistently align with a wholly accurate and authentic reflection of the actual circumstances. For athletes to effectively engage in adaptive coping strategies, it becomes imperative that their appraisals remain grounded in reality. This involves a comprehensive evaluation of their genuine coping resources, the genuine situational demands at hand, and a thorough assessment of available coping alternatives (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 79).

2.1.4 Situational and Environmental Factors Influencing Appraisal

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) identified various situational factors that impact appraisal (Table 2). With only one present of these, a situation with significance will be perceived as stressful (pp. 82–114). Within a sporting context, Thatcher and Day (2008) introduced additional factors, such as inadequate preparations and self- and other-comparisons (pp. 332–333). Environmental factors influencing appraisal involve demands, constraints, opportunity, and culture (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984, pp. 82–114). Didymus (2017) and Didymus and Fletcher (2012) also supported most of these factors in a sporting setting, finding novelty to be the most frequently cited.

Tabell 2

Situation Factors Influencing Appraisal.

Factor	Explanation
Novelty	Direct or indirect unfamiliarity with a situation. In a situations completely novel and not associated with harm, would not lead to an appraisal of threat, while a situation with no association with mastery cannot lead to an appraisal of challenge. Thatcher and Day (2008) introduced an alternative definition of novelty within a sports context, describing it as situations with changes that have not been encountered before (p. 333).

Predictability	Involves situations where previously discovered or learned predictable environmental features are no longer present, potentially signaling a warning for future pain or harm.
Event uncertainty	Probability of appraisals being influenced by the occurrence of a certain event.
Imminence	A part of temporal factors, referring to how much time an athlete has before a stressful event occurs. Depending on cues such as danger, harm, or mastery, the appraisal becomes more intense if the event is imminent.
Duration	Another aspect within the temporal factors. Refers to duration the stressful event persists.
Temporal uncertainty	Lack of knowledge regarding when the stressful event will occur.
Ambiguity	Unclear or insufficient necessary information for the appraisal. In contrast, uncertainty refers to someone's confusion about the meaning of the environment.
Timing of stressful events in the life cycle	Events do not occur in isolation, highlighting that one stressful event may coincide with other events in an individual's life.
Inadequate preparations	A feeling of not being sufficiently ready for a situation.
Self and other comparison	Comparing elements of psychological, physiological, or social performance to others or yourself.

Note. Based on Lazarus and Folkman (1984, pp. 82–114) and Thatcher and Day (2008, pp. 332–333).

Stress experienced during an event tends to intensify when the demands of the situation are difficult to fulfill. In such circumstances, anxiety, as a stress-related emotion, is more likely to emerge, and its impact can be particularly profound if the individual lacks confidence in their ability to manage the situation effectively (Lazarus, 1999, p. 58). This links anxiety to Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy. Research has indeed indicated that anxiety levels can decrease when individuals possess higher self-esteem when confronting stressors (Greenberg et al., 1992).

2.1.5 Anxiety

The separation of stress and emotion into distinct fields has posed challenges within the literature due to their interdependent nature (Lazarus, 1999, p. 35). TTSC regards emotions as responses to stress, encompassing a range of at least 15 different emotions: anxiety, anger, fear, guilt, shame, sadness, hope, relief, happiness, envy, love, pride, compassion, gratitude, and jealousy. Some emotions, such as anxiety and anger, can arise from stressful situations and are thus termed stress emotions. Even positive feelings like happiness can be linked to threatening or stressful contexts (Lazarus, 1999, pp. 34-36). Emotions, as per Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 79), serve as indicators of what holds significance for an individual, aligning with Epstein's self-theory (1976). Each emotion conveys a distinct narrative about the ongoing interaction between the

individual and their environment (Lazarus, 1999, p. 34). While the conventional notion of stress offers a simplified view of an individual's struggle to adapt, emotions provide a more nuanced and detailed portrayal (Lazarus, 1999, p. 33).

Lazarus (1999, p. 232) classifies anxiety as an existential emotion, along with others, signifying that it arises from a sense of threat to our identity and, more specifically, our security, matters of life and death, and our societal status. In this context, *fright* pertains to an immediate and unforeseen overwhelming physical danger (Lazarus, 1999, p. 235), while *anxiety* (state) encompasses a feeling of threat and complex reaction to a situation that objectively lacks danger (Spielberger, 1972, p. 30). Further explained as "a palpable but transitory emotional state or condition characterized by feelings of tension and apprehension and heightened autonomic nervous system activity" (Spielberger, 1972, p. 24). Anxiety manifests as a vague, diffuse, and gradual state of unease (Lazarus, 1999, p. 235), with no concrete reference (Lader, 1986, p. 312). In contrast, fright is typically short-lived with a clearer origination, whereas anxiety may persist according to Lazarus (1999, p. 235). For instance, an individual may fear failure or performing inadequately. Although the circumstances might not be life-threatening, the underlying concern often revolves around mortality or non-existence. As Lazarus (1999) emphasizes, "It is the uncertainty connected with the threat being faced that is distinctive of anxiety" (p. 236). Other existential emotions encompass shame and guilt, each distinguished by unique forms of anxiety. Shame is underpinned by an apprehension of failing to meet one's ego ideal, while guilt revolves around concerns about moral transgressions (Lazarus, 1999, p. 234).

The distinction between state and trait anxiety is well-established. State anxiety is a complex, unique emotional reaction that varies in intensity and exists at a given moment in life, but fluctuates over time (Spielberger, 1972, pp. 29-31). In contrast, anxiety traits refer to relatively enduring and identifiable tendencies to perceive the world, react, or behave in specific ways with a predictable consistency. The stronger the trait, the more likely it is that the individual will experience the corresponding state anxiety, and the more pronounced that state anxiety is likely to be (Spielberger, 1972, p. 31). A high-trait athlete will likely perceive situations as more threatening than low-trait individuals (Spielberger, 1972, p. 42). Cognitive and somatic anxiety are two distinct forms. Cognitive anxiety is the mental aspect, often driven by concerns about bodily harm,

social evaluation, or fear of failure, leading to feelings of uncertainty, helplessness, inadequacy, self-consciousness, and concentration issues (Endler et al., 1991, p. 3). Somatic anxiety, the physical component, is perceived arousal resulting in physiological responses like elevated heart and respiratory rates, muscular tension, and perspiration (Woodman & Hardy, 2001, p. 291). Some researchers propose that these two anxieties can mutually influence each other in stressful situations (Morris et al., 1981, p. 550).

Fear emerges as a direct result of a specific stress-driven evaluation. Variations in fear levels serve as indicators of shifts in how an individual assesses their interaction with the environment. With an increase in efficacy expectancies and a heightened perception of having adequate resources to meet task demands, the environment is appraised as holding the potential for greater control and, thus less threatening. Consequently, this leads to a reduction in fear levels and the initiation of coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 70). The employment of coping strategies stems from how self-efficacy modifies athletes' assessments of their interaction with the environment. However, this shift is attributed solely to an elevation in self-efficacy (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 71).

2.2 Coping

A great interest has emerged regarding coping strategies employed by athletes (e.g., Thelwell et al., 2007; Giacobbi & Weinberg, 2000; Gould et al., 1993b), with Thelwell et al. (2007, p. 221) stating the need to examine coping in alternative sports increasing knowledge for applied practitioners. Lazarus and Folkman (1987) provide a definition of coping as the ongoing cognitive and behavioral attempts to handle particular external or internal demands that are appraised as straining or surpassing an individual's available resources (p. 141). Further stating that "coping arises from an appraisal of harm, threat or challenge, and it can transform that appraisal and hence the emotional response" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987, p. 147). Regarding primary appraisal, when the stakes are high, there should be an increase in coping efforts and heightened focus on the outcomes of those consequences. Furthermore, coping also depends on secondary appraisal, to which degree something can be done to change the experience of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987, pp. 147-148).

Lazarus and Folkman (1987) introduced two primary forms of coping: problem-focused and emotion-focused (p. 147). Problem-focused coping implies that athletes take proactive measures to address sources of stress, when events are appraised as controllable. Emotion-focused coping involves a version of reappraisal aimed at altering emotional responses to an event, often when the situation is appraised as outside of one's control (Giacobbi et al., 2004b, p. 3). Folkman and Lazarus (1980) demonstrated how appraisal is a powerful predictor of whether the coping was emotional-focused or problem-focused. Alternatively, some individuals may choose complete avoidance, hoping the situation will naturally resolve itself. This approach, termed avoidance coping, may offer short-term stress relief but is generally viewed as ineffective over the long term (Madigan et al., 2020, p. 2). Additionally, coping strategies can be categorized as maladaptive or adaptive; Carver et al. (1989) examined functional and dysfunctional coping efforts through the development of a multidimensional coping inventory (COPE; pp. 268–270, 280). Roth and Cohen (1986) introduced avoidance and approach coping as cognitive and emotional engagement directed either in the direction of or away from a threat (p. 813).

Each coping approach affects emotions differently, not only in terms of addressing the situation from a problem-solving perspective, but also in directly managing emotions through techniques like redirecting attention or cognitive methods such as denial, detachment, and reinterpreting the situation. Many of these cognitive strategies modify or reshape the initial assessment, which consequently alters the current emotional experience (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 266). It is worth speculating that the rider's coping mechanisms might have a negative impact on the horse if it, for instance, alters the rider's signals to the horse. This highlights the need to assess emotional reactions in both riders and horses and their interplay.

Stress and coping in sports have been extensively studied. Nicholls and Polman's (2007) systematic review addressed coping classifications, highlighting trait and transactional perspectives as most used (p. 11). Trait coping suggests stability, while transactional coping sees it as dynamic, influenced by internal and external factors. The transactional view is better supported (Nicholls & Polman, 2007, p. 16). Moderators like age, gender, and mediators such as motivational orientation, self-confidence, and trait anxiety impact coping (Nicholls & Polman, 2007, p. 17). Gender's influence seems equivocal, and age

seems to improve coping, making older athletes more effective (p. 18). Individual sports emphasize coping more, likely due to athletes' sole accountability (Nicholls & Polman, 2007, p. 17). Coping links positively with sports performance and psychological well-being (Nicholls et al., 2016b, p. 12; Nicholls et al., 2016a, p. 52). Methodological challenges, notably retrospective methods, have affected much of the research (Nicholls & Polman, 2007).

3.0 Research Questions

While performance anxiety in sports is a recognized phenomenon with a burgeoning body of research, the equestrian sport has not garnered equal attention. Given that performance hinges on a dynamic partnership between a human and a flight-prone animal, comprehending this unique dyadic performance incorporating the horse as a performance variable assumes paramount importance. Given the necessity for a deeper comprehension of performance anxiety among elite equestrian athletes, coupled with an appreciation of the horse's influence on performance, the subsequent research questions are formulated:

How do Norwegian Mounted games riders experience and cope with performance anxiety? In addition, do they perceive the horse's behavior as influencing their anxiety and if their own anxiety reciprocally affect their horse?

4.0 Method

This chapter outlines methodological considerations pertinent to this thesis. It begins by delineating the foundational theoretical assumptions and my role as the researcher. Subsequently, it elaborates on the participants, data collection, and analysis procedures, delves into ethical challenges of relevance, and scrutinizes the study's reliability and validity.

4.1 Theoretical Assumptions and Reflexivity

The present study employed a combination of a relativist ontology and a constructionist perspective on knowledge (epistemology) (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp. 27–30). Truths and versions of reality are constructed in and through the research process (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 224). To investigate the experiences of performance anxiety in MG riders, a retrospective semi-structured interview method with reflexive thematic analysis (RTA)

was utilized, following an ideographic approach advocated by Sparkes and Smith (2014, p. 16). An ideographic approach involves relatively small sample sizes, aiming to preserve the individuality in analysis (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 16).

Qualitative research (and RTA) builds on the assumptions that the research is subjective – affected by the researchers' values, perspectives, history, and mannerisms. These factors play a significant role in shaping the researchers' interpretations of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 36). Based on Finlay (2002) and Gough (2017), Braun and Clarke (2022) further explain knowledge as "situated, and inevitably and inescapably shaped by the processes and practices of knowledge production, including the practices of the researcher" (p. 232). The subjective research amplifies the need to critically reflect on the knowledge produced (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 37), and on the researcher's positionality (Trainor & Bundon, 2021, p. 710). Sparkes and Smith (2014, p. 19) emphasize influencing personal factors such as prior experience, age, ethnicity, and gender. Although I lacked prior experience in qualitative research, I tried to minimize the impact of my inexperience. For instance, I conducted pilot interviews, as elaborated on in a later section of this chapter. To maintain transparency and provide insight into the rationale behind the methodological decisions, I will begin by describing my interest in the topic of the present study. Furthermore, I will include discussions on reflexivity to address the issue of rigor in qualitative research. Discussed further in the general discussion.

As an experienced dressage rider, my fascination with sport psychology originated from a personal encounter with anxiety and fear in the past. This experience led me to delve into understanding the impact of fear on individuals and why we react as we do. Since then, various psychological phenomena have interested me, but none have intrigued me as much as performance anxiety, stress, and fear. This master thesis gave me an invaluable opportunity to further explore riders' experience with this subject, especially considering the horse-rider relationship. Another motivating factor was the desire to contribute to the field of research in equestrian sports. Keeping within the equestrian sport domain, MG riders were selected as participants as we believed they were accessible, gaining knowledge in this team and speed-based discipline. Furthermore, it also separates me from the dressage environment I am familiar with. Availability, accessibility, and theoretical interest are factors to consider when choosing the place or

person to study – according to Schwandt (1997, p. 141). We (supervisors and I) also chose to focus on elite riders, choosing the national team as we thought it would best fulfill the research question. As supported by McGreevy (2007, p. 495), significant variations exist within a discipline, where competitive riding differs significantly from "hobby riders." Hence, there was a desire to concentrate on elite athletes due to their competitive and riding experience, accustomed to performing under pressure. In other words, these riders have competence and first-hand knowledge of performing under pressure and cooperating with their equine partners with the utmost precision.

4.2 Participants

Recruitments started with purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002, p. 244; Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 24), where I contacted riders whom we regarded as valuable informants. Including only riders on the national team provided challenging. Gaining access to elites necessitates creativity and significant preparation, as well as possessing the appropriate credentials and contacts, along with a bit of luck (Odendahl & Shaw, 2002, p. 307). Mikecz (2012) additionally recommends that identifying a suitable medium to reach the interviewees and making contact well in advance could be crucial, while remaining adaptable regarding scheduling (483).

The participants were contacted through the Norwegian Equestrian Association. One rider never responded, one lacked contact information and one withdrew due to lack of time. Except for these cases, I successfully recruited the entire population. One participant was recruited later in the process, due to both further exploration and confirmation purposes. The flexible design and emergent nature of qualitative studies may require sampling decisions not only in the beginning but also along the way, to explore something unforeseen or for confirmation (Pitney & Parker, 2009, p. 42). Holloway (1997, p. 142) describes sampling as an ongoing process following emerging ideas. In total 6 out of 9 riders (5 seniors and 1 junior, all women) agreed to participate (Table 3). To preserve the anonymity of the Norwegian national team of Mounted games riders, we have limited the descriptive information provided, as they represent a relatively small and easily identifiable group. Their experience with MG varied from 8-19 years, with a mean of 13 years (SD=4,3). Four riders also had additional experience from other equestrian disciplines (jumping, dressage, eventing).

As evident above, the sample size was primarily determined by feasible factors. The recruitment process was challenging, and the national team population was relatively small (9 in total). While it's possible that not all themes were fully explored or "saturated", Braun and Clarke (2021b) question if that should be a goal using RTA. Regardless, considering the level and experience of these riders, and deep interviews, they provided a sample that was both information-rich, and highly relevant to the study's objectives. Therefore, a smaller sample size was appropriate (Malterud et al., 2015, p. 1755). Maxwell (1996, p. 97) emphasizes that the benefit of qualitative research lies in the lack of external generalizability, rendering the sample size more irrelevant. The contributions of these riders remain valuable regardless of the sample size, although the number of participants aligns with Braun and Clarke's (2013) recommendation for a small project using thematic analysis, which suggests 6-10 interviews (p. 50). Thus, the inclusion of these six riders was deemed sufficient to address the research questions. The number of participants can be viewed as a limitation (section 6.5). However, considering the small population of national team riders, the sample is quite adequate. The horse-rider partnership faces heightened demands at advanced equestrian levels, necessitating precise communication through aids (McGreevy, 2007). These demands arise from the subtle distinctions required, as many exercises share similar signals with minor differences setting them apart (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2009, p. 156). If we were to include non-elite or less professional riders, this would not align with the research question and make it more challenging to assess the results, potentially confounding the outcomes.

Table 3

List of Empirical Contributors: From Pilot-Testers to Interviewees.

Interviewee/ Pseudonym	Type of Contact	Level of Experience	Type of Interview
Student	Pilot testing	Student-athlete, national level	In-person
Athlete	Pilot testing	International, junior	In-person
Student	Pilot testing		Zoom
Trude	Interview	International	In-person
Nora	Interview	International	In-person
Caroline	Interview	International	Zoom
Emma	Interview	International	Zoom

| Leah | Interview | International | In-person |
| Frida: | Interview | International | Zoom |

Note. Limited information is provided on interviews to protect the riders' anonymity.

4.3 Interview

Individuals and groups vary significantly in their susceptibility and responsiveness to pressure and demands. Equally diverse are the ways they react to and construe their circumstances. This suggests that a single situation could elicit anger in one person while prompting anxiety or guilt in another (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 22-23). This is precisely why I sought to interview these riders; to delve into their firsthand experiences, interpretations, and responses within the competitive arena, particularly emphasizing the presence or absence of anxiety. Based on the research question, interviews were chosen as an appropriate method, seeing as interviews can give an in-depth understanding of how the riders experience and understand anxiety and the impact of the horse on the performance. Interviews have gained popularity in sports coaching research due to their ability to provide a deep understanding and valuable insights into an individual's perspective (Purdy, 2014, p. 161; Tanggaard & Brinkmann, 2012, pp. 17-19). It is not ruled out that other methods could have been used.

Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility by combining pre-determined questions and allowing participants to share their stories and opinions (Purdy, 2014, p. 162). This approach allowed me to adapt the questions to the situation and tailor them to the participants' perspectives. Additionally, the choice of in-depth semi-structured interviews aligned with the aim of highlighting subjective experiences and meanings (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 203) regarding anxiety. One-to-one semi-structured interviews are commonly used in coaching research because they allow for a thorough exploration of an individual's attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and values related to a specific phenomenon (Purdy, 2014, p. 162).

4.4 Procedure

My goal was to establish contact with as many MG riders within the chosen population as possible through gatekeepers (Holloway, 1997, p. 77). These gatekeepers could include acquaintances, teammates, or personnel directly involved with the national team. I initiated the process by contacting the Norwegian Equestrian Association and

the individual responsible for managing MG via email. The email included information regarding the project and its implications for the riders' participation, akin to the details outlined in the informed consent form (Appendix A). Subsequently, they contacted 8 out of 9 national team riders, including seniors and juniors, on our behalf. I also requested permission to obtain their contact information. A few riders expressed their interest in participating by emailing me, while I reached out to the others. Those who did not respond via email were contacted through social media. The messages were personalized, although similar in content, and also often mentioned the specific gatekeeper who had suggested contacting them or had facilitated the communication process. The riders were provided with information regarding confidentiality, as well as the purpose and significance of the study (Appendix A). Time, and if possible a suitable location, were further selected.

Before commencing the interview process, I conducted extensive research on the subject. Given my limited experience with interviews, I dedicated time to studying relevant literature on interviews and RTA (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2013; 2022; Smith, 2015; 2022; Trainor & Bundon, 2021). Following the guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 94), I initiated the interviews by expressing gratitude to the participants for their willingness to participate. I reiterated the purpose of the study and emphasized my interest in their perspectives, reassuring them that there were no right or wrong answers. My intention was to create an open and encouraging environment that would foster candid responses.

I initially preferred conducting the interviews face-to-face, as digital interviews can be seen as less personal (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 89), which may hinder the establishment of rapport. Building rapport is a crucial aspect of interviews, involving the creation of a safe and comfortable environment for the interviewee to share their personal experiences and attitudes as they genuinely occurred (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 316). Additionally, the limited visual cues during online interviews make it challenging to assess the interviewee's body language and level of engagement, potentially affecting the depth and quality of communication (Purdy, 2014, p. 164). Due to geographical distances, time limitations, and busy schedules, conducting some interviews remotely through Zoom became the most practical option in three cases. Zoom has also been labeled as "the closest thing" to a face-to-face meeting (Archibald

et al., 2019, pp. 3-4). Interestingly, Archibald et al. (2019) examined the use of Zoom in qualitative data collection, discovering that Zoom was preferred by 69% of the participants, over in-person interviews, phone, or other videoconferencing platforms.

Sparkes and Smith (2014, p. 89) underscore the potential of computer-mediated data collection to facilitate participants' sharing of sensitive information. This ease of disclosure might be more challenging in a face-to-face context. It's plausible that conducting interviews from the comfort of one's home environment promotes a heightened sense of security and diminishes the formality often associated with traditional interview settings. I conducted three in-person interviews and three over Zoom in a soundproof office at the Norwegian School of Sport Sciences. For the in-person interviews, I asked for input from the riders regarding their preferred location to ensure a comfortable and secure environment (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 18).

The duration of the interviews ranged from 76 to 122 minutes (M = 94, SD =19,5). All interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone. Subsequently, the recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed manually on printed paper transcripts as this felt most practical for me, and supported by Trainor and Bundon (2021, p. 712). When formatted in alignment with the present document, the transcriptions amounted to a total of 216 pages. Following the interviews, I engaged in reflection regarding potential improvements, considering whether specific questions should be added, rephrased, or omitted if they did not contribute to answering my research question. I also contemplated my conduct and responsibilities as a researcher, as well as my reactions, emotions, and post-interview impressions.

As a dressage rider, I possess a partial familiarity with the context, which confers certain advantages such as accessibility, foundational knowledge, and rapport. However, it also presents challenges, including prior knowledge, my personal experiences in the subject matter, and to some extent, role clarity. By distancing myself from the dressage environment and acquaintances, and selecting Mounted games as the focus, I aimed to mitigate the impact of my preexisting knowledge and gain greater clarity in examining the sport and its participants' experiences. In my interactions, I introduced myself as a dressage rider with experience in both national and international competitions. My intention was not to come across as an expert, but rather to convey a

shared understanding of the equestrian domain's common language. This approach aimed to foster more open and candid discussions, eliminating the need for them to explain commonplace terms. Additionally, I adjusted my language to match theirs, such as using "games" instead of "Mounted games."

4.4.1 Pilot Testing

Interviewing requires experience and thorough preparation. Given my relatively limited experience as an interviewer, I prioritized extensive preparation such as conducting pilot interviews. This provided feedback on the interview guide, the style of conducting interviews, and questioning (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, pp. 91-92), while increasing confidence in the interview setting. This process also allowed for testing other practical factors such as the suitability of the location.

I conducted two pilot interviews in-person with experienced riders who were similar to the participants in terms of national and international competition experience, as recommended by Purdy (2014, p. 165). This helped refine the interview guide and enhance my interviewing skills. Additionally, I completed a third pilot interview with a student to familiarize myself with conducting interviews over Zoom. I discussed the interview guide with my supervisors and fellow students both before and after the pilot testing phase, as well as on several occasions during the actual interviews, allowing me to make necessary adjustments and improvements. Feedback included suggesting a reduction in the number of questions on the interview guide, while also discussing potential follow-up questions and the order.

4.4.2 Interview Guide

The interview guide (Appendix B) was based on literature and previous research on performance anxiety (e.g., Bridgeman, 2009; Hogg & Hodgins, 2021; Jones, 1995; Lazarus & Folkman, 1994; Martens et al., 1990; Potter, 1996; Trotter & Endler, 1999; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). Before starting the interview, I presented relevant information and interview guidelines (e.g., right to withdraw consent, confidentiality, prompts to ask questions, and mention of the recording device; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2011, p. 149). Additionally, I introduced myself briefly as an elite dressage rider, to establish rapport and create a comfortable atmosphere for the riders to freely share information about themselves, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 93). The

typical dynamic between researcher and participant tends to be hierarchical, where the researcher holds authority and guides the interview process (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 88; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, pp. 51-52). However, this dynamic is frequently reversed when it comes to elites (Mikecz, 2012, p. 484). To establish credibility and mitigate the existing status imbalance, researchers should underscore their academic and professional credentials along with their institutional affiliations (Welch et al., 2002, p. 625). Mikecz (2012, p. 482) cautions that in elite research, the success and the depth of valuable insights from interviews rely heavily on the willingness of participants to engage openly in conversation, which I feel they did.

The initial question, "Who are you?" followed by "how did you start riding?" acted as an icebreaker, complemented by subsequent follow-up questions that elicited relevant background details (Purdy, 2014, p. 164). Furthermore, I inquired about their experiences with anxiety, opting to keep the questions open-ended, allowing the riders to steer the conversation without excessive guidance. This segment commenced with the question, "How do you experience the competition setting?", seeking insights into both high and low-anxiety scenarios. The subsequent part delved into their experience with the horse as a variable, prompting questions such as "Tell me more about your connection with your horse" and further asking how they perceived their emotions (anxiety) to impact the horse and vice versa. Towards the end of the interview, I inquired about experiences with fear, ensuring it did not overshadow or influence the discussion of other topics. Lastly, the riders were asked to reflect on coping strategies and advice they would give to a friend to cope with the competition setting. Following a common interviewing practice, I began with "easy" questions and gradually progressed to more complex ones, as this approach is believed to make interviewees less reluctant to respond as rapport fosters during the interview process (Purdy, 2014, p. 164). After the recording ended, I asked if they had questions, informed the participants they could contact us anytime, and about receiving the results and transcription.

The interview guide provided valuable guidance and support throughout the interviews, acting as a structured plan that outlined key topics and questions for discussion. Its adaptable phrasing and order allowed for seamless adjustments to address emerging issues during the interview, promoting a dynamic and responsive conversation rather than adhering to a rigid agenda (Purdy, 2014, p. 162). Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 95)

emphasize that the interview guide is a tool, rather than a fixed recipe, making flexibility necessary, and adapting the wording and ordering of questions to the context. This approach enabled me to follow up and encourage participants to share more without imposing my own views. I maintained a non-judgmental and curious demeanor throughout the interviews, showing genuine interest in their perspectives. To establish rapport and foster a comfortable environment, I paid attention to nonverbal cues and practiced active listening (Braun and Clarke, 2013, pp. 95-96).

The interview guide was quite extensive, with crucial questions highlighted for focus. Researchers like Sparkes and Smith (2014, p. 92) state that less questions are favored for higher quality, but as an inexperienced interviewer, the comprehensive guide gave a sense of security. It's important to note that I used the interview guide as a loose framework, adjusting and including or excluding questions based on the participants' responses and the flow of the conversation. This adaptive approach ensured that the interviews remained responsive to each individual's unique experiences and perspectives. This process was inductive to some degree. Purdy (2014, p. 161) emphasizes that interviews go beyond question-and-answer sessions. They are interactive, context-specific encounters that reveal people's opinions, emotions, experiences, and interpretations. This dynamic nature can yield unexpected and contradictory data, actively generating information rather than simply collecting it.

Each interview was unique and different from the others, depending on personalities and our connection and rapport. With practice, I learned to be more relaxed and fluid, transitioning from a more passive interviewer to an active communicative role. Engaging in conversation rather than simply asking questions proved beneficial, as it encouraged participants to open up and share more. As in my case, Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 95) mention from experience that students often start rushed and rigid, with sticking closely to their guide and lacing flexibility in wording and ordering, furthermore becoming more relaxed and fluid with practice. For example, during the initial interviews, I hesitated to ask follow-up questions and delve into sensitive topics that could potentially cause discomfort or emotional distress. This reluctance likely arose due to a combination of factors, including my inexperience and the limited timeframe. As the data collection progressed, I grew more at ease with asking

uncomfortable follow-up questions, allowing for a deeper exploration of certain subjects.

4.4.3 Using Zoom as Data Collection

Using Zoom as a data collection method, I adhered to the Norwegian School of Sport Sciences' internal regulations (Appendix C). However, it's worth noting that while my data were classified as "yellow" according to school policy (Appendix D), the schools' guidelines referenced only "orange" or "red" data. Nevertheless, I followed the prescribed guidelines, which included using the school network, being on campus, limiting chat options, locking the meeting, and using a soundproof room.

4.5 Data Analysis

Following the data collection phase, the process proceeded with transcription. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, orthographic, encompassing not only spoken words but also capturing shorter or longer pauses, silences, instances of laughter, and even writing down questions that could have been rephrased, along with other thoughts and reflections in the margins, recommended by Trainor and Bundon (2021, p.710). While I aimed to capture each word and sound as spoken accurately, it is essential to note, as Braun and Clarke (2022) point out, that a written transcription is a representation rather than an exact replica. The transcription process introduces two layers of interpretation between the original interview and the written transcript, potentially resulting in lost or altered information (p.162). This phenomenon arises due to the divergence between written and spoken language. The punctuation conventions used in writing may not always align with the fluidity of spoken language, where pauses, intonation, and varying pace and volume contribute to conveying meaning. Moreover, spoken language often exhibits imperfections like stumbling, hesitating, word or phrase repetition, or even beginning a thought without completing it (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.162). Consequently, a transcription can be likened to a "partially cooked" version of the raw data, rather than an unaltered representation (Sandelowski, 1994, p. 312). Ultimately, a transcript emerges as a product of the interaction between the recording and the transcriber (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.162).

4.5.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Analysis is an active process that is separate from the raw data itself (Braun et al., 2016, p. 201). Thematic analysis (TA), as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022), involves "exploring, interpreting, and reporting *relevant* patterns of meaning across a dataset. It utilizes codes and coding to develop themes" (p. 224). While this description provides a simplified overview, Trainor and Bundon (2021) explain that thematic analysis "simply cannot be simplified; it is a complex and beautiful method with oh so many options" (p. 705). Numerous forms of thematic analysis exist, but Braun and Clarke's (2013; 2022) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) has gained prominence within sports and exercise research (Trainor & Bundon, 2021, p. 706). The foundation of their TA approach centers on an active and reflexive researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 232). Reflexivity encompasses the process through which the researcher identifies, examines, and reflects on their self-awareness, emotions, experiences, and introspection (Sherry, 2013, p. 283). One of the strengths of this approach lies in its flexibility, making it suitable for both novice and experienced researchers alike (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 178).

The aim of this research was to delve into the subjective experiences and meanings associated with performance anxiety in MG. Additionally, the study aimed to explore the participants' perception of their influence on the horse and, reversely, its influence on them. TA emerges as an exceptionally valuable method due to its utility in examining under-researched subjects (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 178), therefore appropriate given the limited research on performance anxiety within the context of equestrian sports, particularly in MG. It enables the identification of patterns that illuminate participants' lived experiences, perspectives, practices, and behaviors (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297).

While Braun and Clarke (2022) provide guidelines for conducting RTA, it's important to emphasize that these guidelines serve as a framework rather than a rigid formula. The first step involves the process of familiarization, which commences with transcription. After transcribing all interviews, I thoroughly read and re-read the transcripts, immersing myself in the content to identify significant themes and patterns. This phase facilitated a deeper understanding of the nuanced expressions within the interviews.

4.5.2 Coding

I followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) guidelines, as well as Trainor and Bundon's (2021) approach, in their doctoral theses, to conduct RTA. The coding process involved a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. I opted for manual coding on paper, which I found to be the most practical method. During this process, I carefully highlighted crucial sections and made concise notes, focusing on one interview at a time. I also added analytical notes in the margins, including questions, speculations, common themes, and interview comparisons. Following Braun and Clarke's (2013) advice, I aimed for codes that could capture the essence of what was interesting in the data while providing sufficient analytical depth (p. 210). I placed equal importance on how participants expressed themselves, not just what they said (Sparkes & Smith, 2009, p. 496). I undertook a second round of coding, aligning the first round's codes with the new transcript copies to refine and simplify the coding process. It's essential to note that there is no specific endpoint for coding, nor is there an ideal number of codes. The objective is to have a set of codes that comprehensively captures the analytically relevant aspects of the data (Braun et al., 2016, p. 198). For each code, I systematically compiled all pertinent quotes and occurrences found within the transcripts where the specific code manifested within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 211). Subsequently, I proceeded to refine and expand upon these codes to develop overarching themes.

4.6 Ethics and Trustworthiness

4.6.1 Ethical Considerations

The project received approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (Appendix E). During the recruitment process, participants were provided with comprehensive information about the study through an informed consent form (Appendix A). The data were stored in compliance with the school's policy (Norges Idrettshøgskole, 2019). After thorough deliberation and discussions with multiple faculty members and the IT department, it was determined that a secure approach would be to store the data on encrypted flash drives, with one in active use and another as a backup. These drives were stored within locked cabinets. I consistently accessed the raw data exclusively through these flash drives and never retained them on my computer. Furthermore, the identification key was stored separately within a locked box located in a secured office.

Privacy and reducing identification risks was central ethical concern throughout this study. Given the relatively small population and sample size, the potential for direct and indirect identification was a significant concern. Consequently, I placed paramount importance on addressing this issue at every stage of the research process. I took several measures to proactively mitigate any identification risks, including anonymizing any third parties involved and redacting easily identifiable details during transcription. Additionally, during the results-writing phase, I removed any information that had not been redacted during transcription. I took a rigorous approach to quote selection, following Lingard (2019), explicitly opting for quotes that did not reveal significant details about individual personalities, personal stories, or other identifiable preferences. In certain instances, I also anonymized quotes that contained unusual or out-of-the-ordinary details. To further minimize any potential for indirect identification, I carefully reviewed each quote in isolation and in the context of that rider's entire set of quotes. While complete anonymity is challenging to guarantee, particularly with individuals closely associated with the riders such as teammates, family, and friends, I remained unwavering in my commitment to safeguarding their anonymity to the best of my ability.

4.6.2 Rigor and Credibility

The evaluation of qualitative research quality has been a debated topic (Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2021; Smith & McGannon, 2018; Sparkes, 1998). Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021a) have proposed several criteria for thematic analyses. While I aimed to fulfill numerous (e.g., specifying TA type, active engagement, equitable coding, and narrative balance), not all criteria could be met. This study could have explored alternative methods, as recommended (e.g., Smith & McGannon, 2018; Tracy, 2010; Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). However, limited time and resources prevented full implementation. Participant reflections, for example (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp. 282–285; Tracy, 2010, p. 844), were impractical due to time constraints and participant availability, which could have affected recruitment.

Nevertheless, supervisors acted as critical friends in this study, challenging perspectives and encouraging reflection (Smith & McGannon, 2018, p. 113). Transparency remained a central principle, demonstrating sincerity (Tracy, 2010, p. 840). It encompassed various aspects, such as tracing the development of the interview guide and its evolving

role in data collection. Self-reflection covered my experiences with elite interviews, rapport-building efforts, awareness of how my inexperience as an interviewer might influence outcomes, and clarifying my research role, including theoretical foundations and topic choice (Braun & Clarke, 2021a, pp. 345–346). Extensive pilot testing was carried out to enhance my interviewing skills and mitigate my inexperience's potential impact. My commitment to faithfully represent the participants and ethical considerations guided the quote selection, analysis, and final results (Tracy, 2010, p. 840). The riders were also given the option to receive transcriptions or the segments they would be quoted on, offering an opportunity for feedback and revisions, if needed.

I consistently practiced reflexivity throughout the research process, recognizing my positionality and impact on it (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 37), considered a vital step by Trainor and Bundon (2021, p. 710). I believe that my experience as a rider (and with performance anxiety) gave me an understanding of what the participants were expressing, and enabled me to build trust and rapport, while I also had to be careful not to amalgamate my experiences to theirs. Building on Trainor and Bundon (2021, p. 710) describing a similar situation, I constantly sought to be as open as possible, asking open questions and curious of their experiences, emotions and reactions. During the interviews, I had to be aware of what I was silencing or highlighting. As Berger (2015) describes it; a 'continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation' (p. 220). Although my efforts to maintain a research journal (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 21) were sporadic, I actively reflected on various aspects. After each interview, I recorded observations about the tone, rapport, body language, and any significant shifts in participant demeanor. These notes guided me during transcription and analysis. I also engaged in general reflections on topics like transcription methods and my research questions' underlying ontology and epistemology. These reflections often involved discussions with fellow students and supervisors, serving as critical friends who offered valuable insights (Smith & McGannon, 2018, p. 113).

5.0 Results and Discussion

The aim of this thesis was to explore the experiences of Norwegian elite Mounted games riders concerning performance anxiety. It also aimed to investigate whether these riders perceived their horses' behavior as influencing their anxiety and if they perceived their anxiety to impact the horses. In the upcoming chapter, these experiences will be

presented in chronological order and organized around four primary themes: (1) Worry, (2) Dyadic Performance, (3) Teams: For Better or For Worse, and (4) Coping. Table 4 displays the identified overarching themes, themes, and subthemes (Appendix F show visual representation of the analysis process). The results will be discussed in conjunction with relevant research. Each theme will be briefly examined, and the following section will conclude the results with a general summary that synthesizes the overarching themes.

Table 4
Overarching Themes to Themes

Overarching theme	Theme
Worry	Stressors
	Symptoms
	Fear of consequences
	Trait
	State
	Interpretation
	Fright
The Dyadic Performance	Horse's behavior affects the rider's anxiety
	Rider's anxiety affects the horse's behavior
	Horse and rider influence each other
Teams; for Better or for Worse	Unity
	Challenge
Coping	Mental techniques
	Experience
	Physical Preparations
	Communication

5.1 Worry

W*orry* describes the riders' experience of performance anxiety, through the subtopics of *stressors*, *symptoms*, *fear of consequences*, *trait-,* and *state anxiety, interpretation*, and *fear*.

5.1.1 Stressors

Stressors are environmental demands (Fletcher et al., 2006, p. 359) or causes of stress (Selye, 1956, p. 64). Stressors in the literature are often separated into performance-, organizational- and personal stressors (e.g., Arnold & Fletcher, 2021, pp. 33-35; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014b p. 1422). The current project focuses on a holistic approach, similar to Thelwell et al. (2007). When considering stressors, several consistent factors emerged across all the interviews. *The most common stressors were time to think, coach behavior, mistakes, other's opinions, and demand*s. All riders mentioned these to some

extent. Other mentioned stressors included economy, media, and conflict (discussed further in Team; for better *or worse*).

Time to Think. Almost all the riders mentioned Time to Think as a prominent cause of anxiety. They all stated similar accounts, that waiting before the competition started and between heats gave them too much time to think about outcomes, results, and how nervous they felt. Their testimonies align with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) concept of situational factors influencing appraisals, such as the imminence of an event and the duration of anticipation leading up to it (Arnold & Fletcher, 2021, p. 43) and the worry about what is to come.

Coach. Several riders expressed how the coaches' behavior increased their performance anxiety, including differential treatment among team members (Norwegian: *forskjellsbehandling*), insufficient support, and a lack of approachability, potentially unintentionally. The most troubling examples involved coaches reacting with anger when riders made mistakes. Coaches' behavior seemed to be a stressor when riders interpreted, and experienced coaches placed additional pressure on them. Reacting negatively to mistakes was perceived as a signal that mistakes were "not allowed" and this sometimes created a sense of helplessness, having everything to lose, and extremely high demands. As noted by Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 35), situations with high stakes combined with a feeling of helplessness often lead to elevated stress levels and potentially devastating outcomes for the riders. Trude expressed this; she recounted instances of negative coach behavior that resulted in riders feeling fearful, increasing pressure, and indicating a highly threatening situation. Conversely, a more composed coach allowed riders to concentrate on their upcoming tasks.

> Trude: And because that's the worst part, it's to ride... And that's what many coaches do, you know, you make a mistake, and then you look up and the coach reacts like this [shows disappointment, frustration]. That's the worst part. But it's something many coaches do. They throw things when you make a mistake, and you're just like, 'Oh no, I made a mistake.' While our coach, he's really calm, almost to the point where we have to say, 'You need to set some expectations here.' But, on the other hand, no one was afraid to ride. So it's a bit, well, interesting, what is it that... because many coaches can be like, 'Yes, but you need to get there, and we should have that placement,' and things

like that, but then you're adding a lot of [pressure], instead of just saying, 'Ride as you do in training.'

Previous studies show that coaches usually have great respect from their students, but there also exists an asymmetrical power distribution – with a potential to misuse this power (i.e., Haraldsen et al., 2021, p. 6). Haraldsen et al. (2020, p. 116) reported athletes' fear of disappointing coaches or revealing incompetence or weakness.

These experiences with angry coaches are likely exceptions rather than the norm, as Frida offered a contrasting perspective on the coaching culture in Norwegian MG. She explained how she perceived it to be more gentle/soft compared to other countries. Frida also expressed her belief that yelling would not be well received in Norway, as it is not something we are accustomed to, and Norwegians would take it personally. Frida's perception of Norwegian coaches is shared by athletes in other activities (Haraldsen et al., 2020, p. 113).

Mistakes. Mistakes were recognized as another stressor, where how the riders cope with mistakes can determine failure vs. success. One rider shared videos showcasing situations where similar mistakes occurred but were managed differently, resulting in a complete team collapse or minimal time lost. Trude explained how the entire team could be impacted by the mishandling of one or a few mistakes, as it increases the stress level of all the riders, resulting in wanting to 'make up for lost time', further causing more mistakes and a downward spiral. Emma also acknowledged this detrimental spiral that also occurs individually when mistakes are made:

> Emma: It often becomes like, when you make a mistake, you start trying to think too much about not doing it, or what you shouldn't do, instead of focusing on what you should do. Once you get into that kind of spiral, it's terribly difficult to get out of it again... Overanalyzing a bit too much maybe when, once it starts going downhill.

It is hard to say if the mistakes are the cause of or results of stress, nonetheless, the spiral Emma talks about is similar to Ziegler's (1980) "negative thought anxiety cycle", where there is an interaction between somatic, cognitive anxiety and decrease in performance (Potter, 1996, p. 20). This illustrates a bidirectional relationship between

the three components, which can initiate from anxiety and lead to decreased performance, or vice versa. Research by McAuley (1985) highlights that performance (e.g., mistakes) significantly predicts cognitive anxiety. Similarly to the riders' experience, Nicholls et al. (2005) found making errors to be the most frequently reported stressor in elite golfers.

Other's opinions. A recurring stressor was also the fear of other people's opinions. All the riders talked about this stressor to some extent, where most of them had an underlying fear of failure, mistakes, and losing face, combined with feelings of embarrassment and shame as a result of others watching. It could also be considered a fear of consequences. As an example, Caroline expressed how the fear of an audience and others' opinions increased her anxiety:

> Caroline: Everyone is watching the semifinals. There's just this, the entire side was a stand filled with people, so you kind of get that feeling like you don't want to mess up. And it's people you know. You know the whole stand that's over there. Regardless of which country they're from. So it's like that. But I feel like everyone is watching me. How will people in Norway perceive that she, who just won the National Championship, is now in a lower final than the others… So, even though most people know how it works, that's how I think, like 'oh no, they might think less of me now'.

Another example was Emma, who acknowledged that she could get anxious during training as well as competition, but to a lesser extent. She believed her anxiety stemmed from caring too much about others' opinions, which she considered a weakness.

Leah also pointed out the impact of others' expectations but from a different angle. She shared an instance where she excelled in an exercise she usually struggled with. Leah believed the difference in her performance was due to the fact that "here, nobody knows me, nobody expects what I can or can't do. No one expects me to fail in this." This illustrates how constraining expectations can be influenced by self-fulfilling prophecies, where others' expectations act as predictions that shape the outcome (Horn et al., 2021, p. 78).

The presence of others and the stress of their opinions align with the *Drive Theory of Social Facilitation* (Zajonc, 1965), suggesting that the mere presence of others increases

arousal levels. Cottrell et al. (1968) introduced the concept of *Evaluation Apprehension*, the fear of being evaluated by others. Cottrell argued that mere presence alone, as opposed to evaluative presence, should not inherently cause heightened arousal. This theory finds support in studies like Sanna and Shotland (1990) and Bartis et al. (1988). Bartis et al. indicated that if individuals are confident in their abilities, being observed can enhance performance because they see it as an opportunity to showcase their skills. However, those lacking confidence in the task may experience performance anxiety due to constant evaluation concerns.

The stressor of being observed and evaluated can also result from an imbalance between perceived expectations and capabilities, aligning with TTSC (Lazarus, 1999, p. 58), particularly when others anticipate you to excel in exercises you already find difficult. Equestrian athletes also cooperate with their equine partners, who can also become stressed by the audience and the transition from the familiar training environment to a competition venue. Lazarus (2000, p. 244) highlights that public events reveal the athlete's comparative competence to everyone who knows about the sport, and this is a significant anxiety source.

In alignment with prior research (e.g., Mellalieu et al., 2009; Trotter & Endler, 1999), social evaluation has been identified as a significant stressor. Trotter and Endler (1999) found it to be a primary source of increased state anxiety in equestrian sports. Mellalieu et al. (2009) highlighted the theme of *self-presentation*, which included concerns about being evaluated by others, such as teammates, coaches, spectators, and significant individuals in their lives. Within this theme, worries about one's image and competence were frequently mentioned, reflecting concerns about how others perceived them. The fear of performing in front of large crowds and the pressure to excel were also mentioned as stressors in Mellalieu et al. (2009). Similarly, Giacobbi et al. (2004b) identified the theme of *performance expectations* when examining stressors. This theme included sub-themes such as *perceived expectations, pressure to meet performance standards, concerns about not performing as expected,* and *feelings of being unable to contribute effectively to the team*. They also identified the theme of *interpersonal relationships*, which encompassed the presence of people watching, including the coach. Past research has indicated that female riders tend to dedicate more time to worry about social evaluation (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2009, p. 158).

Demands. Another recurring stressor was generally an imbalance between demands and expectations created by high demands, too many demands, new, unknown demands, and often a combination of these. Demands are seen by Lazarus (1999, p. 61) as the most obvious stressors. Among others, Frida placed exceptionally high demands on herself, not only in Mounted games but also in other areas like school. She mentioned a championship where she had won almost every competition leading up to it and had predetermined that she must win. External comments echoed the same sentiment, intensifying her performance anxiety. It was apparent that the high demands both she and others placed on themselves were the cause of their anxiety. Frida also noted that when she did not perceive her skills as sufficient, she experienced less anxiety. In such cases, her expectations for placement were low, and her focus shifted to learning and enjoyment rather than winning.

There seemed to be a tendency in the data for "the planners" to be more vulnerable to unknown demands, as indicated by several riders. Emma grappled with the challenges of unknown demands. This anxiety surfaced in various situations, such as the stress associated with competing on a new horse for the first time; the uncertainty of how it would react, as she described as: "I was very tense; it wasn't a very enjoyable competition to ride. I found it quite scary to ride because I didn't really know how things worked, you know, all ponies are different. Especially the experienced ones have their ways". Emma also struggled with anxiety related to logistical factors like traffic, parking, unfamiliar arenas, and uncertain competition schedules. Interestingly, Emma had a strong penchant for planning and packing, sometimes enjoying it as much as the competition itself. Mellalieu et al. (2009) also identified organizational stressors similar to Emma's experience, particularly those related to concerns about logistics. This parallels Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) predictability and event uncertainty as situational factors influencing appraisals.

Caroline and Leah shared similar experiences where a combination of demands led to heightened anxiety. For instance, Leah was recovering from an injury and participating in her first World Championship (WC). As a relatively inexperienced MG rider and a new team member at the time, she felt that her skill level was not up to par. Additionally, she had to use a borrowed pony, as the competition was on another continent. In Caroline's case, she was competing in a semifinal for the first time,

experiencing media attention. This aligns with the concept of personal control as outlined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 65). In highly uncertain situations, athletes with an external locus of control tend to perceive the situation as less controllable, whereas those with an internal locus are more likely to appraise it as manageable (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 67). It can be posited that in situations characterized by ambiguity, the internal locus of control assumes a significant role.

These stressors resonate with findings from other research, for example *Demands related to preparations* (Weston et al., 2009) and *pressure* (McKay et al., 2008). For instance, Gould et al. (1993) and Mellaileu et al. (2009) discovered *internal-* and *external expectations* to be significant stressors, with Sarkar and Fletcher (2014b) highlighting these as the most common performance stressors. *Internal expectations* involve self-imposed demands, such as the desire to start competitions strongly or maintain a high rank. *External expectations* result from pressures exerted on athletes by external sources, like being considered favorites in a competition or the expectation of top performances. (p. 1422). Additionally, the concept of *roles within the sports organization* as a stressor, identified by Fletcher et al. (2012), bears resemblance to the demands discussed in this study. This includes scenarios where there are too many roles (demands), a lack of role clarity, and role conflicts due to competing demands.

5.1.2 Symptoms

While some riders generally considered themselves calm, several of them experienced anxiety symptoms on competition days. For example, Nora described somatic symptoms like "a punch in the stomach," which occurred unexpectedly and lasted for about two minutes at a time throughout the day. In contrast, Caroline primarily experienced cognitive symptoms, including negative self-talk, self-doubt, and reduced self-efficacy. For others, anxiety manifested as a vague sense of unease. Leah, however, experienced a combination of somatic and cognitive symptoms. Her anxiety started with self-doubt and progressed to physical tension Emma also had a mix of symptoms, like feeling sick, along with cognitive distress during competitions. She described a competition with the following statement:

> Emma: And it's also the same thing where I find it, like, it's a bit difficult for me to calm
> down because I think about this the whole day. Like, at the Oslo Horse Show, I was

really looking forward to it, but I was so nervous. I don't think we were supposed to ride until around 5 o'clock or something, but I had to leave the stable, I had to leave home at 8 o'clock because we had to go here and there, and I had training somewhere else. I was completely exhausted by the time it was 12 o'clock because I was just walking around with nerves in my body.

Common physiological and behavioral manifestations associated with anxiety include heart palpitations, changes in respiration, sweating, restlessness, tremors, and shuddering, among others (Freud, 1936, p. 70). Previous research has suggested that elite riders often exhibit lower levels of somatic arousal compared to non-elite riders (e.g., Mellalieu et al., 2006a), potentially due to their ability to manage physiological symptoms associated with somatic anxiety or arousal based on the context of their interpretation (Meyers and Sterling, 2000; Meyers et al.,1997; Wolframm & Micklewright, 2009). Nevertheless, further research is needed to validate and reinforce these findings, particularly at the highest equestrian levels (Lamperd et al., 2018, p. 106). It's important to note that this study has not examined the intensity or degree of the symptoms, which should be further investigated. Nor has it compared them to, for example, non-elite riders.

5.1.3 Fear of Consequences

Caroline: That's where it's like, I get so afraid that I'm going to embarrass myself. 'Oh no, now... I won't win, and it's just going to go badly'... You become sort of afraid of not doing well. I was much more, like, stressed, thinking 'what if it all goes to hell'.

Fear of consequences revolves around the thoughts of what might happen, like Caroline's statement, anticipating and envisioning "nightmare" scenarios or catastrophizing. These are thoughts that all the riders had experienced, where they feared irrational and unlikely outcomes, typical "what if..." thoughts. This can be linked to a general fear of failure, making a fool of oneself, again making mistakes, or losing. Fox (2008) argues that the fear of failure arises from an enormous gap between the practical and psychological consequences of winning and losing, where winning is highly rewarding while losing is extremely painful. This fear is compounded by the inherent uncertainty and lack of control surrounding the outcomes (p. 173).

Fear of consequences can be general or unspecific thoughts of fear, as with Caroline above, but it can also pertain to specific situations. For example, Frida and Caroline often feared the horses bolting, where the horse runs off, and the rider loses control, which they both had previously experienced. They mentioned doubtful thoughts about exercises they had previously struggled with but since overcome. Nora and Caroline mentioned doubting their training, thinking the others had trained more and better. In other cases, riders experience the fear of consequences as 'being afraid of being afraid' or 'being nervous for becoming nervous', as Caroline and Emma explicitly stated. The fear of other people's opinions is also a part of this theme, as both Nora and Caroline mentioned how it is embarrassing to lose, which seemed to come from the fear of 'losing face' or letting your supporters down.

5.1.4 Trait

Here, trait pertains to the overall anxiety levels experienced by the riders. Significant individual differences exist in their characteristic anxiety levels, ranging from minimal anxiety to extremely high levels. When prompted to describe their usual anxiety and tendencies to react by rating nervousness on a scale of 1 to 10 – the responses varied between 3 and 10. Trait anxiety is, as opposed to state and arousal indicators, relatively stable characteristic ways to react; part of their personality, referring to Spielberger's (1972, p. 31) definition of trait anxiety. When queried about their ideal state before and during a Mounted games competition, the answers spanned from 4 to 9. Despite their preferences for distinctive levels of arousal and anxiety, they all shared a common rationale: finding a delicate balance that allows them to follow the horse and the tempo, without "losing their head". Only one rider (Emma) expressed typically having higher levels of anxiety than she desired, rating herself at 7, but believing 5 would be the ideal. She seemed to face some challenges in managing her anxiety, yet she noted that the nerves would dissipate or cease bothering her once she started riding. On the other hand, Leah and Caroline reported generally experiencing their desired anxiety levels, their archetypal being middle-to-high. Trude and Nora, both highly experienced, believed that they were somewhat too relaxed and should exhibit slightly higher levels of anxiety or arousal than they typically experienced. This illustrates how some want higher arousal. They attributed their relaxed state to the fact that national-level competitions have a different skill level compared to international events. Nora later stated that she often felt "flat": "I often feel like I'm quite flat. I'm not very nervous or

excited in a way; I keep it there, and so far, I feel it works very well for me… … I manage to stay in control".

Although some of the riders experienced varying degrees of anxiety levels and symptoms prior to the competition, almost everyone, like Emma and Caroline, felt they had control once they started riding. For instance, Caroline stated: «When the course builders come out and start building, it's like total chaos in my head, and I'm doing all sorts of other things, and then the whistle blows again, and I'm focused».

5.1.5 State

State anxiety describes situation-specific anxiety/arousal levels caused by the specific setting. Several riders highlighted that their anxiety varied significantly depending on the competition. When inquired about instances where significant nervousness played a prominent role, consistently championships and finals came to the forefront. The decrease in anxiety when starting riding, mentioned in *Trait*, seemed less prominent during these major events. Notably, in several cases, this heightened anxiety translated into diminished performance, and in some instances, it even culminated in instances of choking, as further elaborated in the general discussion. In most cases, it was apparent that the stakes were high, with high demands and conceivably low self-efficacy, mentioned by Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 35) as anxiety-inducing. Caroline and Emma were among the riders who reported increased arousal and anxiety during championships and semifinals, aligning with findings from other studies (Nicholls et al., 2005). This supports TTSC, suggesting that stress appraisals are linked to the perceived importance of athletes' goals and their commitment level (Lazarus, 1999, p. 70). Finals and championships are often perceived as significantly more important than less essential competitions. The increase in stress and anxiety might be due to higher demands and higher stakes, where mistakes become more catastrophic, as Fox (2008) asserted.

Conversely, Nora felt more performance anxiety in minor and less influential competitions. She felt it was more embarrassing to lose/not win in smaller competitions because she felt people "expected" her to win those. In major competitions like WC, where the general competitive skill level is high, she felt less pressure based on lower

expectations. Frida also described something similar, experiencing more performance anxiety when perceiving the likelihood of winning as greater:

> Frida: When I know there are people with a much higher skill level than me, I don't feel as competitive [anxious]., like I want to win, but I accept losing. But when I compete against people at the same level, whom I know I can beat, then I get a strong competitive instinct [performance anxiety], and a real competitive spirit. It's very important to me not to let them win over me... So it's more like I become very focused on beating those I know I can beat.

She further believed high anxiety levels were acceptable when coping with it effectively, a skill she seemed to possess for the most part. Emma had high anxiety regardless of the competition level, although she also mentioned feeling increased anxiety in finals, focusing more on points and scores rather than "just riding".

Increased state anxiety during finals can also be linked to their focus, as several riders expressed that their attention shifts from "simply riding" and the tasks at hand – to contemplating points, the consequences of errors, the fear of failure, and the desire to win. Another factor that intensifies pressure and expectations during championships was the representation of one's country, riding with the national flag proudly displayed on their chest. This aspect, mentioned by Emma and others, brings both honor and tremendous weight of responsibility, intensifying the desire to perform at their best and, in turn, increasing pressure.

The riders also experienced varying anxiety levels depending on whether they were participating as individuals or as part of a team; Mounted games encompass individual, couple, and team-based competitions. The differences in team vs. individual competitions also demonstrate how individuals interpret the same situation differently based on their demands. Emma experienced increased pressure and a sense of responsibility during team competitions, leading to elevated anxiety from fear of letting her teammates down. Whereas in individual competitions, Emma felt she only disappointed herself if mistakes were made, finding this less anxiety-inducing. Similarly, Mellalieu et al. (2009) found being responsible for your team's performance as a stressor. On the other hand, Frida and Nora placed more pressure on themselves

during individual competitions because they are solely responsible for their performance, and any mistakes are apparent. In team competitions, they believed that accountability is shared among team members, and had reduced anxiety. Intriguingly, they all favored the competition form that increased anxiety. One supposition could be that they have a stronger preference for one type of competition, leading to higher self-expectations because it holds greater significance or value to them. This can result in an increased imbalance between demands and capabilities, thus causing stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Research has shown that team sports athletes experience lower cognitive and somatic performance anxiety than individual sports (Kirkby and Liu, 1999; Martens et al., 1990; Simon & Martens, 1979). Scanlan (1977) suggests this could be because team sports involve less individual evaluation, and performance responsibility is distributed across the entire team.

> Frida: I experience a much stronger competitive instinct [performance anxiety] individually than I do in team competitions because then it's all about me. Team competitions, at least the way I feel about team competitions, I don't take it as seriously, or I do take it seriously, but not so seriously that making a mistake triggers me. But when I ride individually, especially in a competition like the European Championships or the Nordic Championships, it affects me quite deeply if I perform poorly... in the Nordic Championships, individually, that's when performance anxiety gets quite high.

The quote illustrates how individuals appraise and interpret their situations differently. What appears to be a threatening situation for some, is the opposite for another. These distinctions arise from their unique perspectives, influenced by individual and situational factors, in line with Lazarus and Folkmann (1884). For example, Leah interpreting the arousal as a challenge and something desirable, whereas others seemed to experience this as a threat.

5.1.6 Interpretation

There were also differences in the riders' interpretation of their anxiety symptoms. For some, the symptoms felt more uncomfortable rather than pleasant and debilitative to some extent. Although it seems that none of them generally interpreted nerves as extremely debilitating; instead, many had a moderate or neutral relationship with their nerves. They acknowledged feeling nervous, as mentioned, and often considered it

negative, but they mostly coped with it. At the same time, as mentioned by most, they found that the nerves disappeared when they rode, having no significant impact on their performance. Emma illustrates this:

> Emma: [I] tell myself that I just have to remember to breathe, because there's often a lot of waiting and stuff, and things get delayed, and then [anxiety] just gets worse, so it doesn't feel very good. So every time, I think, "Why am I doing this? Why am I exposing myself to this? It's not fun at all." I feel really sick, you know, I don't find it fun at all. But as soon as I enter the course, typically taking a brief lap around, everything suddenly feels fine. So, I forget everything, and I can just ride.

Leah was the one who stood out the most, as she viewed arousal in a facilitative manner. The fact that she used the phrases "being switched on" or "in a heightened state" (Norwegian: *påskruddhet*) reflects a more positive interpretation, conveying a sense of positivity compared to those who referred to it as nerves or performance anxiety:

> Leah: I would say that I'm pretty good at handling it [anxiety]. I don't get too much anxiety or negative nerves. Maybe I do have it actually, but I try to transform it into something positive. … I enjoy that feeling of competing. So, I really love that adrenaline rush. I love it, and that's when I get the most… my heart rate goes up and [get heavy breathing], but I have a positive adrenaline because of it. Yeah, I think it helps. So, it's what I was talking about earlier, about transforming it into power. Using it right.

Using TTSC, Emma seems to interpret the competition setting as a threat, whereas Leah appraises it as a challenge. Lazarus (1999) elaborates that a challenge appraisal indicates that the forthcoming difficulties can be surmounted with self-confidence, persistence, and enthusiasm (p. 33), which seems to align with Leah's perspective.

Seemingly, each person had unique situations where nervousness negatively affected their performance, occasionally to the point of hindrance. Yet, these were isolated and rare incidents. It was evident that all the riders shared a profound passion for riding and competing regardless of anxiety levels, even though some, like Emma, experienced significant discomfort before competitions. The fact that all riders in the study were

elite may explain why few experienced highly debilitating nerves. Past research indicates that non-elites tend to view anxiety as more inhibiting, while elites often see it as facilitative and desirable, even actively seeking this sensation (Mellalieu et al., 2006a, p.15; Jones et al., 1993). Anxiety is seen positively when confidence in managing and achieving goals is high. Conversely, if confidence is low, anxiety may be seen as harmful. The athlete's assessment of their ability to control their environment and themselves determines their interpretation of anxiety symptoms (Jones, 1995, p. 462). There is still a need for research on how anxiety interpretations affect performance and why (Hanton et al., 2008, p. 52; Hanton et al., 2004, p. 479). Nevertheless, research in equestrian sports (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2010; 2011) and others indicates that a facilitative direction of anxiety promotes performance (e.g., Besharat & Pourbohlool, 2011; Hanton & Jones, 1999), with self-confidence as a moderator (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2010).

Additionally, Wolframm and Micklewright (2010) further demonstrated that the more intense both cognitive and somatic anxiety symptoms are, the less likely riders are to perceive these symptoms as facilitative. This suggests that as the level of pre-competitive arousal increases, riders are more inclined to interpret it as anxiety rather than a helpful state.

5.1.7 Fright

All riders faced fear in their careers, often stemming from harmful incidents such as accidents or injuries, supporting findings by Scanlan et al. (1991). For instance, Trude shared her experience of lacking technical knowledge during an exercise, resulting in many frightening situations. She reflected, "I have often experienced being somewhat afraid in that situation." Caroline had similar experiences, especially with horses bolting, and despite it no longer being an issue, she still grapples with the enduring impact. Nora, in contrast, was uncertain about the root cause of her fear but later suggested that dealing with an unpredictable horse may have been a factor.

Mounted games, with many ponies together in high-speed action, is a high-risk sport that comes with potential injuries and accidents (Sorli, 2000). Exercises involving dismounting and remounting the horse and exchanges were typical situations mentioned as fear-inducing. Some riders discussed having thoughts revolving around these risks.

For instance, Nora explained that "Coming into the finish line on grass at full speed can be scary because it's like a race to the finish, and then you have to stop, ensuring the horse doesn't slip on the grass, so it's a bit scary". Emma, on the other hand, acknowledged occasionally thinking about the ease of getting kicked in the head and becoming disabled (a concern that intensified with age). Emma shared that these thoughts can be disruptive: "I often find myself unable to concentrate on the exchange or what's happening because I'm already thinking about crashing into that fence." This description aligns with the processing efficiency theory, explaining how anxiety might affect performance. When preoccupied with worries, individuals tend to consume their cognitive resources, leaving them with reduced attentional capacity available for the primary task (Eysenck & Calvo, 1992). It is worth noting that such thoughts appeared to be passing and having little inhibiting impact.

Having experienced how dangerous and catastrophic collisions can be, one rider feared that others may not fully comprehend the seriousness of the situation. Her heightened awareness of potential consequences drives her to be vigilant, ensuring everyone is mentally present and well-prepared, including aspects like nutrition before events. Furthermore, she emphasized the importance of prioritizing the team's well-being over individual performance, as she worries that focusing on individual performance might lead to distractions or a lack of concentration.

> But I'm very afraid of riding with people who don't understand the consequences of a crash. So because I was so involved in it, I became very focused on, you know, safety, the consequences. And if you then ride with someone who doesn't eat, or who is just focused on themselves and their own performance, and they can come in and not perform well in a way. That makes me very scared because I know the consequences of it.

Another intriguing discovery was the influence of the environment on fear, suggesting that fear has a contagious quality. Trude pointed out that riding with others who are anxious or in an atmosphere where the focus is on things being frightening can amplify this feeling:

Trude: Also, there's a significant difference when I've ridden with people who don't really understand that, for example, jumping on a galloping horse is dangerous... But if there's a strong emphasis on "if you're afraid, don't jump" [whispering], "okay, but then I'll never jump, is that what you want?" So, I had a [training] mate, she doesn't do Mounted games anymore, but she's completely like, she has no understanding that jumping on is dangerous. And then I do it. Because she can't comprehend, like, "what the hell is the problem," we don't talk about it, it's not really a thing. But then I've ridden with coaches who are very much like, "oh my god, if you're a little scared, don't do it," or people who really emphasize that it's a scary thing. And then it spreads.

Others have experienced longer, more inhibiting periods of fear, or fear related to specific situations. Leah expresses the internal conflict of feeling fear despite her mental readiness but not physical readiness. She describes the struggle of engaging in potentially dangerous activities while trying to convince herself that everything will be okay. She refers to working through this period as going "from heaven to hell and back again, with all that." Interestingly, Leah notes that the fear seems to be dependent on the particular horse the rider had an injury or bad experiences with. On the other hand, Caroline and Frida state that they feel frightened independently from the pony. There is a significant lack of research on fear in sports, with some focusing on fear after injuries (e.g., Mittly et al., 2016). Brymer and Schweitzer (2012) explored fear in extreme sports, where fear was described as "ever present and overwhelming" (p. 481).

5.2 The Dyadic Performance

Considering the connection between the horse and rider is unique to equestrian sport, exploring how the riders interpret the influence of the horse on the performance, relating to anxiety, is relevant. Therefore, whether they experience the impact of anxiety on each other, will be discussed in this theme.

5.2.1 Horse's Behavior Affects the Rider's Anxiety

Surprisingly, obtaining a clear and definitive answer regarding how the riders' anxiety affects the horse and vice versa proved challenging. While discussing specific events and situations, it appeared that anxiety had an influence on both the riders and the horses, often in reciprocal ways. When asked directly about riders experiencing anxiety "contagion" from each other, many were uncertain or could not give a definitive

response, leaving the possibility open. Trude, for instance, initially expressed uncertainty but later mentioned that when riding young horses, she needed to maintain lower arousal in herself to avoid stressing the horses. The most challenging aspect of obtaining a clear answer was how the horse's anxiety symptoms influenced the rider's anxiety.

Trude, Nora, and Leah appeared to have a more conscious understanding of arousal levels and anxiety than some of the others. They were more focused on deliberately influencing the horse's arousal level, by intentionally calming it down when it was stressed and generally working on the horse's inner calmness. Rather than the riders reacting with anxiety to the horse's stress symptoms, they were able to keep their emotions in check. Nora, for instance, maintained a rational focus where she tried to find out what the horse was saying: "I have to take those messages seriously when that horse tries to tell me something". Rational thinking is also a coping strategy in elite figure skaters (Gould et al., 1993b). When asked if Trude felt like the horse's anxiety affected her, she answered the following:

> Trude: Hmm... No. It would have done, like maybe 10 years ago. But, um… but with him, it's like, yeah. Um, yeah, no. But he is also like, he can get panic attacks from random things. So I can't, like, join in on that. I have to be calm and stuff. And when we get to places, he becomes like, "oh, what is this, oh," [nervous], and then it takes 2 minutes, and he becomes calm, in a way. But if I join in on this, it won't work in a way.

Trude is conscious of the stress and anxiety levels in herself and her horse but uncertain whether it transfers to one another. When her horse becomes stressed, she recognizes the importance of staying calm and appears to manage this effectively. Some of the other riders appeared to be more affected when their horses experienced stress.

Many riders emphasized the significant variations in horses' temperaments, which seemed to be a mediator considering how horses' behavior affects riders. This aspect was particularly relevant for Emma, as her level of anxiety was influenced by the temperament of the horse she rode. She discussed the differences between two horses she had ridden, comparing a mare that was hot-headed and fiery to a gelding with a calmer disposition:

Emma: In general, he was much easier to deal with, and he was just so chill. While she, when she's out hacking, she's like a power walk. And if I wanted to gallop, I had to dismount to calm her down again. Whereas he could just go full gallop into a halter and just, trot, canter… He was like [easy]... So, I liked him much more in a way. Even though I was fond of her too, it's not that. But things were just so much easier. And suddenly, it became really fun to ride games again. I felt like games had become a bit not fun [Norwegian: *kjipt*] in a way. But I wasn't quite aware of it until I got to try riding the other one [gelding].

Emma further explained that on some days, she accepted that her mare could be difficult, but on other days, she was more affected by it, becoming angry and frustrated. While this did not necessarily cause anxiety for her, it was a stress response manifested through anger (Lazarus, 1999, p. 35). Nora explained a similar situation with affecting different on different horses. The idea that temperament acts as a mediator for arousal and performance finds support in the work of Wolframm and Micklewright (2010). They investigated whether riders' perceptions of equine temperament influenced their arousal levels and subsequent competitive performance. Their findings revealed that the perception of equine temperament plays a significant role in eliciting arousal and performance outcomes. Specifically, riders' perception of dressage horses as 'active' (described as excitable, temperamental, hot-headed, and spirited), similar to Emma's mare, was linked to increased somatic anxiety and debilitative interpretations of cognitive anxiety. A horse perceived as excitable and temperamental is also likely to be seen as adding to the inherent risk of show jumping (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2010, p. 34).

Experience significantly influences the way horses impact riders. Factors like self-efficacy and prior experience in handling similar situations empower riders to effectively manage rather than be adversely affected by the situation. Aligning with Bandura (1977) and Beauchamp and Whinton (2005), who emphasize the predictive value of self- and other-efficacy in the unique horse-rider relationship. Trust in the horse, familiarity with its behavior, and a robust rider-horse bond contribute to this resilience, as noted by both Emma and Caroline. Tufton et al. (2023) also highlight the importance of closeness, commitment, and complementarity in predicting the overall human-horse relationship, which is crucial for performance.

5.2.2 Rider's Anxiety Affects the Horse's Behavior

Riders held differing views on whether the horse was affected by the rider's emotions like arousal, anxiety, and stress. Nora, Frida, and Emma found it almost apparent that horses were influenced, unlike Caroline, Leah, and Trude, who were uncertain but not dismissive. The latter three acknowledged the possibility without complete certainty. Caroline shared her experiences from a few competitions where her stress seemed to affect her horse, causing it to become firm, fast, and challenging to control—a behavior described by several riders as a stress response.

Several riders, like Nora and Caroline, recalled situations where they felt highly stressed or anxious and noticed changes in their horse's behavior, often describing the horses as becoming "harder to ride," displaying symptoms such as increased strength and a desire to run away. Frida explicitly expressed her belief that horses can sense the rider's emotions, stating, "Yes, because if you have nerves, that transfers to the horse, and if you ride with your shoulders a bit high, the horse also raises its shoulders in a way." Little research is reported on the subject, but differences in behavior can, as Williams and Tabor (2017) highlight, be that the horse reacts to the rider's imbalance and possibly poor physical condition. They say that "an unbalanced rider will not be able to give clear and consistent aids to the horse, therefore affecting their behavior when ridden." (p. 28). Unlike Williams and Tabor's study, this study focused on elite athletes, a level requiring good balance and physical condition. Trude also remembered that if she attempted to retrieve one of her horses from the paddock while feeling stressed, the horse would not respond. She believed that this was because the horse reacted to her stress. Leah and Trude shared similar experiences when loaning their horses to other riders who seemed uncertain or fearful, as they both noticed distinct changes in their horses' behavior. This highlights that experience and skill level have an impact on the dyad.

> Trude: I have lent him to people. And when they get very stressed, what often happens is that if they are unsure and all, he doesn't feel like running. And he doesn't want to leave the stable, the yard, and then I come and he does it anyway, sort of. Um, so I think he is more influenced by it in the sense that he is testing boundaries rather than being scared, in a way… but a few years ago when I got him, he probably would have been scared.

With this, Trude underscores the role of the horses' experience as a factor in their response to their riders, a point also emphasized by Emma. Wolframm et al. (2010) propose that rider experience can compensate for an inexperienced horse because performance depends on both parties (p. 334). Frida also had some interesting thoughts on this matter. She believed that an experienced pony gets more aroused and alert in competition and finals, suggesting that the horse has learned to anticipate the situation. In contrast, an inexperienced pony maintains its usual behavior, as it lacks an understanding of the event.

Several others also highlighted that their impact on the horses greatly depends on the horse, having experienced little impact on some but also encountered others that seemed highly affected by their nerves, anxiety, or emotions. Just as horses vary in temperament, factors like sensitivity and experience were highlighted particularly by Emma, Nora, Leah, and Frida. Emma, for example, shared insights into one of her horses, which seemed highly attuned to the rider's emotions. She described how the horse became strong when she was stressed, echoing the experiences of others, as mentioned. Furthermore, she emphasized: "She sort of lost her head, kind of like I maybe did too... It went really well during training and all, but the added pressure that comes with competitions made it tip easily because she was so sensitive as well." Nora had a similar experience with one of her horses:

> Nora: I also had a horse, at least in the beginning when I had her, that as soon as I got a little tense, it was a complete shutdown, like pulling down a roller blind instantly. So, I've spent a lot of energy trying to be heavy and calm, not to stress... she senses it very well if I'm sitting there trembling in the saddle, there's not much connection to get from the pony... she starts jumping and bouncing a lot, getting completely worked up and not knowing what to do with herself.

One of the riders made an intriguing observation recently. She coaches other riders, and many of the horses they ride tend to get stressed and anxious in various situations. However, when she instructs these riders to close their eyes while riding, the horses become remarkably relaxed. Her interpretation of this phenomenon is that when riders close their eyes, they shift their focus inward, becoming more attuned to the horse's sensations without being distracted by their visual surroundings. Her observations raise

the possibility that horses might be more sensitive to the emotional state of riders than we commonly realize.

5.2.3 Horse and Rider Influence Each Other

Despite some uncertainties regarding the themes above, several riders held in summary the belief that there was a mutual influence, with some also asserting that both the horse and rider influenced each other in terms of anxiety. Frida was perhaps the one who provided the most straightforward response on this theme. She firmly believed in the mutual influence between rider and horse and was confident in her belief that the rider's state of mind directly impacts the horse, and conversely, the horse's behavior can influence the rider. Frida had experienced this several times, especially in a championship recently. She entered a final feeling somewhat stressed, given that her team held the second position with just one point. She felt her horse being aroused/stressed, causing her to struggle with maintaining control. This, in turn, escalated her stress levels. This cascade of events led to mistakes on her part, compounding her stress even further. Ultimately, this culminated in the horse becoming more challenging to ride. She pointed out that it is a very sensitive horse, to the extent that if the rider has tense shoulders, the horse mirrors that as well. Others, like Nora and Emma, shared a similar perspective on this reciprocal effect. Trude and Frida mentioned how stress could cause the rider to react stronger or differently than usual, especially if the horse was acting differently than usual (further discussed in 6.2 and 6.3):

> Frida: I feel that it's very easy for people to get angry with their horses or let their nerves affect their horse, for example, if the horse cuts a turn because the rider forgets to ride the turn properly, or if the horse is pushy, or if it bolts or is strong, or something like that, if it's behaving in a way that it doesn't usually do. And it [rider's anger] comes out when you're already stressed.

This supports a mutual influence, as the rider's stress influences the horse's actions, and the horse's actions (either due to their own increased stress or misinterpreted rider cues) increase the rider's stress.

5.3 Teams; for Better or for Worse

This theme illustrates how the team can work as both a coping mechanism through social support or opposite – as a stressor. This part also discusses challenges arising in a team setting.

5.3.1 Unity

"Talent wins games, but teamwork wins championships" (Jordan, 1994, p. 24). Many of the riders talked about the supportive environment in Mounted games, describing a "helping culture", where people help each other to a great extent, including lending horses, helping with training or practical things in competitions, and as emotional support. This often extended to the national team, where team building was also deemed valuable. The riders described a strong unity and a norm to do most things together. At competitions, they usually set up a camp near the stables, where they all sleep, and they try to eat together, often combining meals with team meetings. Trude made a point of never leaving someone behind in the stable when tacking up the horses, pointing out that if someone finishes before the others, they help the rest. It was clear that unity was something they highly appreciated and of great importance. Trude and Emma explained that they depend on their teammates – seeing it is a team sport first and foremost.

Trude and Nora described a WC where the team had perhaps the worst preconditions and preparations leading up to the championship, including sickness, injuries, and pregnancies. Even though Trude meant their individual skill levels were low, – they still performed better than they had in 10 years. When discussing why this might be, both Trude and Nora attribute the good unity they had:

> Trude: Yes, so we are very close-knit. But there's something about it, what did we do that allowed us to [perform well] and I think one of the things is that we were mothers who were on a trip. Who are very good at putting the collective ahead of themselves. That there were no divas involved at all. There's no solo play. And no one gets angry with each other.

Nora also highlights the harmony within the team, noting the absence of drama, conceivably attributed to the team members being adults of similar ages with comparable life experiences. While Trude and Nora did not explicitly state that the

absence of stress acted as a mediator, their descriptions of mutual support, collaborative performance, and lack of interpersonal conflicts underscore strong group cohesion. Group cohesion can be described as a dynamic process characterized by the group's tendency to stay united while working towards their shared objectives and fulfilling the emotional needs of its members (Carron et al., 1998, p. 213). Cohesion, this way, can potentially alleviate performance anxiety and stress, in line with research indicating that group cohesion, particularly task cohesion, reduces state anxiety (Prapavessis & Carron, 1996) as well as diminishes arousal and anger (Terry et al., 2000). Team cohesion has been linked to social support (Westre & Weiss, 1991; Rees & Hardy, 2000) and competitive success (Carron et al., 2002a; 2002b). Social support is the mutual exchange of resources between two or more individuals, a process perceived by either the giver or the receiver as aimed at improving the recipient's well-being (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984, p. 13), or to many people, simply some sense of emotional support (Weinberg & Gould, 2015, p. 184). Social support is found to reduce stress (Sheridan et al., 2014).

Emma had some experiences where she choked early in a team competition and consequently had high performance anxiety the following sessions. She explained that her teammates helped her through it by being supportive. She further explained that this was one of the reasons she enjoyed MG as much as she did; having many supportive people around you. The team and the coach got her to try again later, which went fine. This is an example where the team functioned as a social support, lowering stress and anxiety, and increasing self-confidence. Caroline and Leah also shared similar experiences, particularly when Leah consciously talked to her teammates if she felt her performance anxiety rising, knowing they could talk her out of it. Talking to teammates when nervous was also something Rees and Hardy's (2000, p. 339) participants used.

In their study, Kerdijk et al. (2016) delved into coping mechanisms and stress within team sports, particularly examining the impact of the social environment. They found that, in about 50% of stressful situations, the participants believed that the presence and behavior of others affected how they perceived and managed the stress (pp. 5–6). Interestingly, this interaction tended to result in adopting more effective problem-solving and emotion-regulating coping strategies, making it more probable for individuals to view the situation as a challenge rather than a threat. Conversely, when a

situation was seen as threatening, individuals were more inclined to employ less effective coping strategies or none at all. In these cases, external influence from others was less likely to play a significant role. This aligns with the riders' perception of team dynamics as important and highlights teammates' role in challenge appraisals. Social support has been identified as a coping strategy in various other studies (e.g., Dale, 2000; Giacobbi et al., 2004b; Gould et al., 1993a; 1993b) although interestingly in Giacobbi et al. (2004b), the quality of the relationship was of importance, requiring close trusting relationships and willingness to give and receive support (p. 15), supported by this study. However, this was not the case in the study by Giacobbi et al. (2004a), who speculated that the variations in the time frames being assessed (e.g., acute vs. chronic stress) and sampling differences may account for why their participants did not report utilizing social support (p. 180). Based on Lazarus and Folkman's (1987) research, individuals seem more likely to utilize social support as a coping strategy when their well-being is in jeopardy instead of situations where their self-esteem is on the line (p. 148).

As illustrated above, there is a strong and valued team dynamic and unity in MG, but surprisingly Leah described a change in the environment and mindset through the years. Especially after the pandemic, she experienced a shift towards an individualistic mindset. People are less interested in prioritizing the team and more focused on themselves. Leah explains that this makes it challenging to foster a team mentality, and that the younger riders may not realize the value of joining a team with experienced individuals, as they can learn and improve significantly by riding together. While she acknowledges that this shift is based on her personal experience, she believes everyone must recognize the importance of team mentality and a collective contribution in elevating each rider's skill level.

5.3.2 Challenges

Nora: "We are 5 people on a team who have not necessarily chosen to ride together...". While the team seems to function as a coping strategy, through social support, and perhaps a stress buffer, it can also act as the opposite. This theme will discuss the team as an organizational stressor. The riders discussed different challenges that can occur in the team setting. As Caroline, Emma, and Nora mentioned, they rarely choose their teammates but are placed in a team with riders with different needs and personalities.

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Previously (section 5.3.1) it was explained how good unity and team dynamics reduced performance anxiety. In the opposite case, Leah and Emma explained how varying the team dynamic can be, emphasizing that a defective dynamic or lack of unity increases pressure and affects performance.

> Emma: Well, I've ridden on many different teams, with a lot of different people. And, you shouldn't take it for granted that you have a good dynamic. That you have good camaraderie. Because, I mean, you might not know each other all that well either. But I've also ridden on teams where the dynamic wasn't all that important, where you just ride, really. So, for the World Championship team, I felt that it was important for them that we had good camaraderie. But then I've also ridden on teams, as I said, that didn't think so much about that camaraderie and stuff, and it was a very good team, um, and I really felt the pressure then. And I rode with four other guys, and it was very much like, well, I rode beyond my abilities in a way because, um, it was just what they expected. And then it was just like, "Oh, okay, yeah, well, that's just how it is."

Leah explained how a bad team dynamic can be frustrating and how this results in the team being a stressor, especially if there is a lack of communication, or common goals or mindset. Shared commitments, attitudes, aspirations, and goals are important to a positive team climate (Weinberg & Gould, 2015, p. 164). Leah believed strongly that it affects performance, and when asked, she said, "Yes, immediately! I think it takes quite a bit for us to have a terrible dynamic and still perform at our best. I don't think that's entirely possible." Leah believed that individually good, skilled riders not necessarily function together as a team without a common language or a shared vision of how the team should be. Similarly, Trude also emphasizes the need to contribute to the team positively. For example, she explained that someone's attitude could be «contagious». If one rider makes a mistake and gets angry or upset, the attitude is what affects the teammates, along with the stress of «making up for lost time," as mentioned in *Stressors* (section 5.1.1).

> Trude: The difference between a good and a bad games rider in a team is that you can have really good individual riders, but it might be that they're not so good in a team, for example, if they get angry at the others on the team, right? Or if they, 'ah,' pull the team

down, or if they make a mistake and go inside themselves and sort of disappear... because we're out on the field for an hour.

As close-knitted as the riders described the national team to be, it is also dependent on each individual contributing to the community by working as a unit supported by research on social loafing (e.g., Hanrahan & Gallois, 1993), and their personalities matching, although research shows this as less important (e.g., Widmeyer & Williams, 1991). Still, the team seems vulnerable to individuals not fitting in or sharing the team's values and mindset. Interestingly, some interviewed riders discussed the struggles of not fitting in. One rider sometimes struggled to be a supportive teammate and explained a situation where she got annoyed and irritated when the team made many sloppy mistakes, and she felt like the team "sabotaged" her. Although she emphasized that this attitude varied from team to team and the riders on it.

> Last year, I withdrew from the team because I had no motivation to ride in a team. This year, I feel that it's a nice team, but I still feel that it's silly, it's a silly trait, but I become very much like if we make a relay mistake, I become very much like 'Oh my god, come on, guys.' I don't say it to the team, but I think it. And maybe I say it to my mom and dad.

Building cohesiveness in a mix of lacking personal time, space, and privacy can increase other challenges within the team setting. As previously discussed, MG riders prioritize team unity and fostering a positive atmosphere, often engaging in collective activities. However, a collective focus can sometimes disregard their individual needs, such as the desire for solitude – a point several riders brought up. While some riders found that their teammates respected and accommodated their need for personal space, others felt that there was limited room for solitude. A couple of riders referred to this as a "social quota," illustrating the challenge of balancing personal needs with the team's collective preferences:

> But it's really hard for me to understand because I want to be with them, I want to contribute and bring my part, but then I don't function as a whole, you know? I can either sit down for dinner with you all or join you on the field to ride; it's like I have to choose a bit because I use up my quota for being with people. So, it's really hard to explain.

This rider struggled with her role on the team, as her personal needs to perform well and function optimally conflicted with the team's "needs". Leah also acknowledged the challenge of balancing individuality and collective performance by calling it: "a double role, you see, because you have to make sure you perform, do your job, but you also have to make the others ride well [Norwegian: *ri de andre gode*]."

Conflicts can also occur due to miscommunication or even leadership problems. Several riders have experienced conflicts arising, such as team members staying out partying or disagreements in how to treat the horses. A shared experience was that conflicts increase stress. This is seen in other studies, too – such as Mellalieu et al. (2009), where "social interaction" and the relationships between team members were identified as a significant stressor for athletes prior to competitions, and conflicts deemed as distressing. Lenk (1969) noted that the absence of conflict is a fundamental requirement for teams to perform well. At the same time, he highlighted that teams function best when they are small and highly integrated (p. 393). At the same time, Trude felt that shyness of conflict is as bad as conflict itself because it creates tension without anyone knowing why or what. In their synthesis of research, Arnold and Fletcher (2012) mentioned many of the same stressors associated with teams, such as teammates' behaviors and interactions, communication, team atmosphere and support, teammates' personalities and attitudes, roles, cultural norms, and goals. Being a team player requires a lot, one must be a positive contributor, and there is little room for individuals who do not fit in, although at the end of the day, sound and open communication seems to be the key to a happy, unified team.

5.4 Coping

The coping strategies employed by the riders to manage their anxiety and navigate the competitive situation are described through four subthemes: *Mental Techniques, Experience, Physical Preparations,* and *Communication.*

> Leah: Well, you know, it varies in terms of how people deal with performance anxiety and nerves. Some very skilled people work very systematically on it, with a mental trainer and all, and they need a system. While others, also really good riders, believe it doesn't do anything. So, I think it's simply about finding what works for oneself.

5.4.1 Mental Techniques

As mentioned earlier, the riders had diverse anxiety levels, some aiming to relax, while others sought to increase their arousal. They employed various mental techniques like visualization, controlled breathing, self-talk, balancing demands and abilities, and enjoying the moment. As Leah and Nora highlighted, coping strategies depended on individual needs, appraisals, and personal preferences. Nora described it as "steering the mind in the right direction."

Visualization. Several participants utilized visualization with slight variations. Trude, Nora, and Leah imagined themselves performing at their best and mentally primed themselves for each race, often focusing on specific moments. Trude used visualization right before the competition to prepare for the routine's start. Leah also appreciated visualization to attain the right mindset before competing, although she noted that it is easy to forget amidst the hustle and bustle of competitions. Nora employed visualization to mitigate her fear of falls and accidents. She achieved this by visualizing worst-case scenarios but with positive outcomes, reducing the lingering fear rather than ignoring it.

> Nora: I've touched on this before because it's a common thing in games that people fear getting hurt, and that's why they're often hesitant to push their limits and jump onto the horse and such, because nobody likes getting injured. It's not that I'm completely indifferent to the idea of getting hurt either. But my technique to handle it has been that I often visualize myself falling, and getting seriously injured… That I jump and end up under the horse and everything, but I always manage to get up and complete the competition. For me, it works in a way that it makes getting hurt seem less daunting, like I have an image of myself that, injuries don't affect me and I can still... it's okay. ... so you don't always have to visualize everything going perfectly. But visualizing myself taking a major tumble, that worked for me.

While many riders found visualization beneficial, Caroline had a contrasting perspective. She struggled to control her mental images and often visualized unwanted outcomes. Moreover, she pointed out the considerable day-to-day variation in horses, making it challenging to stick to a rigid plan and react to unforeseen circumstances. Instead, Caroline preferred to clear her mind or focus on thoughts unrelated to riding. Notably, research has shown that techniques like imagery and cognitive restructuring can help modify threat appraisals (Didymus & Fletcher, 2017; Williams & Cumming,

2012), which can enhance well-being, improve performance, and elicit adaptive emotions. Furthermore, Hanton et al. (2004) emphasize the role of visualization in bolstering self-confidence, especially when visualizing past or forthcoming successful performances.

Balancing Demands and Capacity. A recurring facilitator to manage performance anxiety and competition stress, was to either reduce demands or enhance their sense of competence. Nora talked extensively about realistic expectations, like when she was riding a young, inexperienced horse, she focused on improvement and mastery, instead of winning. She also tried viewing competitions as unimportant, even prestigious events like Nationals or World championships. This helped alleviate the pressure. Leah, Caroline, and Emma also supported the idea that lowering expectations could reduce anxiety. For instance, Emma's experience during a Nationals event demonstrated that reduced expectations led to an unexpectedly outstanding performance. Caroline shared a similar perspective, where not fixating on winning and riding with a carefree attitude proved to be her best strategy for coping with competitions.

> Leah: Like, "what are you riding for?" And I find that it helps me a lot to think I'm there for myself. I push myself to see what I can do better and how much further I can go during a competition. I'm not riding for all those people watching or the other riders who might be a thousand times better and whatever opinions they might have about how I perform, I don't care about that. It's nice, of course, if people think I'm doing well and say it, but that whole thing like "oh no, they're watching, I have to be something for someone else," I exclude that. So if they think I'm bad, then let them think that. That's perfectly fine. It doesn't have any value to me in a way.

Have Fun. Lowering demands and shifting focus away from winning can be achieved by emphasizing the importance of having fun. Riders like Leah, Caroline, and Trude stressed the value of enjoying the sport. Amidst the pressure often associated with elite sports, especially in championship events, it is crucial to remember the joy of riding that initially drew them to the sport. Leah, in particular, has embraced this perspective, finding solace in the time spent with her horse. Emma also highlighted a day when she made mistakes but enjoyed herself so much that her performance and placement seemed inconsequential. This shift in focus from competition to enjoyment appears to reduce stress levels and enhance overall resilience.

Caroline stressed the importance of recognizing that riders are not alone on the course; they have a horse as their partner. Therefore, maintaining a positive attitude is crucial, not only for the rider's benefit but also for the horse's well-being. She believed that having fun serves as another effective coping strategy:

> Caroline: Just having fun, really, not entering a gloomy bubble where you have to think about things. It's like, I feel that if you just radiate a little bit, it helps a lot... So, I believe that in all sports, you know, if you want to be the best, you have to have fun! And you have to be able to cheer for yourself and cheer for others. That's just how it is. Yeah, you have to keep the atmosphere upbeat, plain and simple.

Hanging with teammates and having fun can provide overall well-being, satisfaction, and happiness, as it removes the focus of challenges (Giacobbi et al., 2004b, p. 9), or seriousness, as Caroline called it. It can also serve as a form of avoidance coping, something Anshel et al. (2001) consider appropriate when needing to distract oneself from stressful encounters, especially when it seems out of one's control (p. 389).

Trude acknowledged that she used to be more focused on short-term victories and defeating others, which often overshadowed the joy of the sport and the long-term aspects of training and development. She found equestrian games to be more enjoyable when the emphasis shifted from merely winning every competition to observing the horse's development and the dyadic performance: "It really becomes so much more enjoyable if you can see a broader spectrum in a way. And it becomes much more fun if you can look at each little step for THAT horse based on its capabilities. Not based on, like, everyone else's." Trude's perspective highlights the importance of transitioning the focus from performance and rankings to mastery and development, which might also reduce demands. This aligns with the motivational Achievement Goal Theory (AGT; Nicholls, 1989), where a distinction is made between focusing on personal development vs. measuring performance compared to others. In this context, a high degree of mastery orientation is preferred, according to research (e.g., Duda & Treasure, 2021, p. 72; Nicholls, 1989, p. 339).

Other Techniques. Before competitions, many riders encountered negative self-talk, mainly when things did not go as planned or mistakes occurred. However, they were skilled at countering this with positive self-talk, a valuable technique for boosting self-

efficacy (e.g., Hardy et al., 2004, p. 252; Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2008). This positive self-talk took two primary forms: motivational and instructional. Trude and Caroline often employed short, reinforcing phrases like "focus" or "concentrate." Trude even verbalized these thoughts aloud. Self-talk has been documented as a widely used coping strategy in various contexts. For example, professional cricket batsmen utilized positive self-talk, both motivational and instructional, to overcome the fear of failure (Thelwell et al., 2007, p. 223).

Other cognitive techniques used by the riders included music, to reduce or increase arousal or "boost the mood." For example, Trude listened to upbeat and joyful music that got her in the right mindset. Other strategies involved accepting the situation, being present in the moment, setting goals, and employing subgoals. When feeling overwhelmed by stress and anxiety, some, like Emma, found it helpful to completely detach from the situation, providing a mental reset for a fresh start the next day. Hanton et al. (2004) also advocate for cognitive strategies, such as positive self-talk and cognitive restructuring, to enhance self-confidence.

While the other coping strategies so far have been primarily cognitive, Nora adopted a somatic approach to cope with her nerves, focusing on her physical sensations, she tried "Rolling or twisting the stomach to try to kill the sensation, in some way attempting to tighten the abdominal muscles." Furthermore, she felt she could control her mind and mental state to some extent, but it bothered her more when she felt the physical sensations in her stomach. Because Nora's symptoms were often somatic, utilizing somatic coping strategies proved to be effective, in line with the "matching hypotheses" theory - effectively managing symptoms with the same (somatic or cognitive) techniques (e.g., Hardy et al., 2009). Breathing was another commonly employed somatic anxiety-reduction technique utilized by most riders before and during competitions. Emma, however, found it minimally effective and accepted that nerves would persist before competitions and dissipate when she started riding.

Mindset when mistakes are made. Coping with mistakes plays a critical role in managing performance anxiety. Trude and other riders emphasize the importance of maintaining the right mindset. Quickly moving past mistakes, focusing on improvement rather than dwelling on errors, and not allowing emotions to overwhelm are common

strategies. Frida termed it "not losing your head," something the riders find easier said than done. Trude: "It's about not allowing yourself to get caught up in those emotions, like thinking this is terrible." The riders highlight the significance of acknowledging achievements alongside errors. Trude often observes the opposite; many become obsessed with their mistakes while failing to recognize their accomplishments. Leah stresses the inevitability of mistakes and the importance of acceptance: "You know, there are many who are seeking perfection, and we do, and maybe it's going to happen at some point, during some competition, but there will always be things that happen, and then just accept it and move on." She also suggests being fair to the horse, practicing "the art of letting go" when things do not go as planned, and giving it another try next time.

5.4.2 Experience

Experience significantly aids in handling performance anxiety and competition situations. For instance, Caroline and Frida stress the role of experience in learning to manage mistakes and nerves. They both emphasize learning from errors as an essential part of this process. Frida's personal experience of emotions taking over gave her a wake-up call and taught her the importance of controlling her nerves and emotions, especially handle mistakes. Her recent competitions highlighted the positive impact of experience and age on managing performance anxiety.

These riders have evolved in their abilities and mindsets over the years, learning from their experiences and developing resilience and improved strategies for managing anxiety and competition. For some, the reduction of nerves seems to stem from reappraisal; gaining a new perspective, in support of TTSC (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984, p. 38), something also seen in Giacobbi et al. (2004b). Trude, for instance, has grown more patient and understands the significance of mental aspects alongside the physical. She believed that various horses, including borrowed ones, and extensive teaching have made her more resilient and capable of handling various situations. Firsthand experience, as Bandura (1977, p. 195) suggests, increases self-efficacy, and is seen as invaluable by Trude. Caroline has shifted her approach to think more strategically. Nora used to experience higher anxiety levels but has become a better rider over time, resulting in fewer errors or less catastrophic ones. Evaluation is also a significant factor in this process, with Nora being particularly diligent in analyzing

competitions to understand what works for her, a practice seen in other athletes as well (Thelwell et al., 2007, p. 229).

Experience indeed positively influences a rider's ability to manage pressure and anxiety. As highlighted in section 5.2, it appears experience also plays a role in the behavior of horses. Many riders, like Emma and Leah, believe that experienced games ponies handle competitive situations more comfortably. They perceive them as more predictable and manageable. This can be a reason why some horses are less affected by the rider's stress. In contrast, as Trude and Nora noted, younger horses often require more support and calmness from their riders. Considering that horses are flight animals and may perceive competitive situations as threatening due to various stressors like crowds, music, applause, and unfamiliar environments (Riva et al., 2022), it seems that experience teaches the horses that competitive situations are less menacing and dangerous. This increases the need to familiarize young horses with the competitive setting, with the rider signaling safety and trust, rather than threat.

Many riders see the relevance between their everyday life experiences and sports, and they manage to transfer life experiences into sports. For example, two of the riders worked in the same profession and made a deal where one of them taught the other how to ride in exchange for learning how to improve at their job. One of them said:

> "And we said the same thing, 'do it properly,' 'invest [time],' 'communicate clearly with your partner.' It was exactly the same words. 'Eh, don't be too wishy-washy, don't be harsh,' you know, right? So it was very much like, 'oh, this is actually a lot of the same stuff it takes to become good at games, in a way, it's very much the same."

Nora also found relevance in her job, where she learned to handle high-stress situations and manage multiple roles. She believed this experience had aided her in MG. Leah shared a similar sentiment, mentioning that her job taught her to differentiate between "the person" and "the performance" and how to handle adversity. She stressed that various factors beyond her control, like judges, competitors, or conditions, influence one's performance.

5.4.3 Physical Preparations

Various physical preparations and routines were used before and during competitions, showing a wide range of preferences. Video analysis was a common practice, but opinions on its usefulness varied. Caroline and Nora did not favor video analysis, as they did not find it particularly beneficial and preferred recalling their performance from memory. On the other hand, Trude valued video analysis for technical insights and boosting confidence (Norwegian: *trygghet*), as she believed that things often feel faster and scarier than they appear.

> Trude: Also, because if you get a little scared, it's okay to watch the video and say, 'No, it didn't go that fast.' Because often that's the case, that you can feel like it's going very fast. Then you watch the video and you're like, 'aha.' It helps me a lot. If not, I think you can build a perception that you have a crazy horse. I think there are quite a few who do that, build a picture of, 'Oh my god, it's going so fast, and it's like this, and oh my god, I can't jump on that horse and lean down,' and then it's like, look at the video, it's doing nothing.

Planning, such as making packing lists, emerged as a stress-reduction strategy for several riders. Effective planning is recognized as a fundamental element of preparation for sports performance (Mellalieu et al., 2009, p.738). It involves preparing for various factors like weather and field conditions before important competitions. Upon arrival at competition venues, some riders, like Nora, preferred orienting themselves and familiarizing themselves with the surroundings. This included the stables and the warm-up areas. This practice was echoed by Leah and Caroline, who enjoyed getting a sense of the atmosphere, and watching other riders. However, not all riders found this beneficial, and watching other competitors has been considered a stressor in past research (Mellalieu et al., 2009, p. 743). During competitions, riders had varying preferences for having a detailed "game" plan. Emma preferred a competition plan, whereas others, like Nora, felt it depended on the horse's predictability. Nora highlighted that it was fine to create a solid plan with predictable horses, but it was better not to have a clear, rigid plan for unpredictable ones. This sentiment was echoed by Caroline, who emphasized that having a plan could be disruptive if it could not be followed.

In addition to planning, routines during competitions are crucial. Riders like Leah and Nora mentioned preparing equipment and ensuring everything is ready for use before the event. Trude emphasized the value of routines in providing horses with a sense of security and making the unknown familiar, especially amid all the new experiences at a competition venue. Nora also stressed the importance of maintaining routines as similar to home as possible for the horse's comfort.

> Nora: It's actually quite similar to a regular day at home. The idea is to try to make there not be such a huge difference between a competition day and a regular day at home, both for my own sake and for the horse's sake. Because it's a completely different experience for the horse if there's a lot of extra fuss, and suddenly we're spending over an hour with a horse instead of 10 minutes. It should be as similar as possible so that there aren't a lot of surprises and new impressions, because there are already plenty of new impressions. So it's pretty much like when I saddle up at home. There aren't any extraordinary routines, really.

Caroline mentioned the concept of "playtime," which was very important to her. This was time she and a friend would spend on having fun, and as Caroline described:

> Caroline: Just goof around, maybe listen to music or something, fool around a bit… and we sit down and just talk about everything and nothing. It seems like a nice way to break up the seriousness that many feel in competition settings and focus on having fun.

Since Mounted Games is a risky sport, preparations revolve around getting as ready and focused as possible. All the riders mentioned food and drinks as crucial, and it was clear that this was a factor they had significantly discussed. As mentioned in *Unity,* eating together was something they highly valued. Trude explained it this way:

> Trude: For my part, I think that if we have trained for several months and, you know, we travel together, it's selfish not to eat. Because if you make a mistake, it affects me; we are a unit. So, we must give ourselves the best conditions to perform. And if you don't eat and wonder why you're dizzy in the arena and can't keep up with the horse, it's very dangerous, and it's not only bad for you, but it's also bad for the whole team. So, I get really irritated by people who say, 'Oh no, I don't need food,' and I'm like, 'No, but...' [laughs in frustration] and the pace is so high, so, if you enter a relay and you're not focused, it's really dangerous.

Physical training is essential for optimal performance. Trude highlights the importance of extensive training, including unconventional methods like picking blueberries or flowers while riding, to boost confidence in leaning down. Some riders worked with sports psychology consultants; others practiced meditation and yoga for relaxation. Rest is a critical factor in success. While additional horse caretakers are uncommon in mounted games, Nora recently found this practice beneficial in providing more rest and reducing concerns. Nora discovered the value of reducing her cognitive load, while Emma had a unique experience during a home competition. Emma not only rode but also organized the event, which involved various responsibilities beyond riding. This occupied her mind and surprisingly led to lower anxiety levels. One of her biggest stressors was time to think, and this might have prevented excessive thinking. Overall, the riders displayed solid competition routines, but few rituals, something Frida interestingly mentioned. Routines can contribute to a sense of control, similar to the impact of routines on professional cricket batsmen (Thelwell et al., 2007, p. 229).

5.4.4 Communication

Communication plays a central role in coping and achieving optimal performance. This involves interactions with the team, horses, and coaches. Riders highlight the importance of communicating effectively with their horses for performance and stress reduction. Dressage exercises are commonly used to establish good contact and communication with the horse during training and warm-up. These exercises also help gauge the horse's condition. Clarity in communication is essential. Trude emphasizes this, especially when borrowing horses she considers "less is more." Caroline underscores the significance of knowing the horse well, while Frida highlights the role of trust in ensuring safety (Norwegian: *trygghet*) and cooperation.

Effective communication within the team is crucial, especially in a team sport like Mounted Games. Many riders, including Trude, Nora, Emma, and Leah, participate in expectation clarification meetings with the national team during the spring. These meetings are a platform to discuss team functioning, individual roles, and specific needs. Mellalieu et al. (2009) highlighted that roles within the team are often a source of stress, making pre-season discussions highly relevant. Riders frequently check in with their teams before and during competitions. These meetings focus on creating a shared plan, objectives, and goals. Post-competition discussions involve evaluation.

6.0 General Discussion

The study aimed to address the following inquiries: (1) How do Norwegian Mounted games riders perceive and manage performance anxiety? (2) Do riders believe their horse's behavior affects their anxiety and vice versa? To answer these questions, qualitative in-depth interviews were employed with the Norwegian Mounted games national team. The theoretical framework guiding this study draws from Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping theory. This section discusses the results in a broader perspective, their alignment with existing knowledge and focusing on specific aspects of the findings. It also delves into the practical implications and limitations of the study.

6.1 The Experience of Performance Anxiety and Coping in Mounted Games

It is evident that worry is a common element in the competitive experiences of equestrian riders, manifesting in various forms. Many riders encountered performance anxiety at different points, stemming from a range of stressors and exhibiting varying symptoms. What is also notable is the highly individual nature of this phenomenon; some riders grapple with high performance anxiety under similar circumstances, while others remain more unaffected, indicating the role of individual interpretation. It is also essential to recognize that moments of fear were not uncommon, even among elite riders. Considering that working and cooperating with a horse increases risks of injury and accidents and is therefore considered dangerous (Sorli, 2000, p. 60), awareness and acceptance of fright within equestrian sports are essential. The findings align with the theoretical framework of Lazarus and Folkmann (1984), where stress is an appraised unbalance between demands and capabilities, emphasizing the individual interpretation.

Coping in equestrian sport has proved to be a complex process, with a wide array of strategies to cope with performance anxiety, like visualization, breathing, and positive self-talk. Some riders occasionally sought higher arousal using, for example, music. These techniques predominantly fall into the category of emotion-focused strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 147). Problem-focused strategies, like physical preparations, experience, and communication, also play pivotal roles in helping riders attain their optimal arousal levels, mainly aiming to take proactive measures to address sources of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 147). Many of these strategies have

been found effective in previous research, often used in combination (e.g., Giacobbi & Weinberg, 2000; Giacobbi et al., 2004a; 2004b; Gould et al., 1993a; 1993b; Hanton et al., 2004; Mellalieu et al., 2009; Nicholls et al., 2005; Thelwell et al., 2007). Giacobbi et al. (2004a) utilized TTSC (Lazarus, 2000; Folkman, 1992) to explore stressors and coping among swimmers. Notably, stressors exhibited significant variations, and the choice of coping strategies was guided by situational appraisals. Additionally, threat appraisals display a positive link with emotion-focused and avoidance coping, but a negative correlation with problem-focused coping (Dias et al., 2012). Nicholls et al. (2005) found problem-focused coping to be stated more than emotional- and avoidance coping, with problem-focused strategies (planning) used more in advance of the competition, while emotional-focused (breathing, self-talk, acceptance) often were used closer to and during competition.

Self-confidence plays a pivotal role in coping with anxiety (e.g., Mellalieu et al., 2006b; Edwards & Hardy, 1996; Hays et al., 2009), also in equestrianism (Beauchamp & Whinton, 2005). This is in line with Lazarus and Folkman (1984). They emphasized the importance of self-confidence in effectively handling situations - serving as an important moderator between anxiety and positive emotions like challenge. Conversely, viewing the world as hostile or dangerous likely leads to threat appraisals, which in turn can result in heightened anxiety and decreased performance (p. 65). In this regard, cultivating self-confidence enables riders to perceive situations as challenge, like Leah. While breaking free from a negative cycle that can occur when perceived threats and anxiety mutually reinforce each other, as seen in Emma (section 5.1.6). Additionally, it increases effective behaviors (e.g., confident body language) and constructive thought patterns (e.g., focusing on the current task) (Hays et al., 2009). In the presence of fright, anxiety, (and negative self-talk), higher self-confidence empowers elite riders to perform without impairment (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2009, p. 154). Implied implications for elites suggest working on preparations, motivating coaching, positive self-talk, and social support (Hays et al., 2007). Except for positive coaching, which should be implemented, the MG riders already employed many of these strategies.

6.1.1 Teams; as a Stressor and Coping

This study's results highlight the demanding nature of being a teammate, as riders must navigate the balance between individual and team needs. Most deemed unity and

cohesion crucial, while some also experienced a "social quota", needing alone time. The sense of unity among riders also seemed to provide a feeling of social support, acting as a stress buffer and enhancing performance, also seen in Rees et al. (2007). A harmonious team dynamic, with team mentality and commitment, was described as pivotal to peak performance. This concept is supported by existing research, even among Olympic champions (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). Social support has also been linked to coping with competitive stress (Crocker, 1992). Rees and Hardy (2000) identified social support along four dimensions: emotional, esteem, informational, and tangible. Athletes in their study received help dealing with pressure, nerves, and doubts within these dimensions, similar to the findings of this study. Moreover, these dimensions have been associated with higher levels of self-confidence and reduced burnout (Freeman & Rees, 2010; Freeman et al., 2011). This underscores the importance of social support and its role in coping with anxiety.

Cassel and Cobb introduced a stress-buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Pressman, 2004, p. 780), having received mixed evidence in sport (Freeman, 2020, p. 452). This hypothesis suggests that perceived support can shield an individual from the potentially adverse effects of stressors, leading to less stressful appraisals (Cohen & Wills, 1985, p. 310). This concept aligns with stress process models, appraisal, and coping, consistent with Lazarus and Folkman's work (1984). Social support can help reframe the threat posed by a stressor (reappraisal), enhance coping strategies, or provide a sense of control. These elements collectively work to prevent a stressor from being perceived as highly stressful (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Cohen et al., 2000). When stress is experienced, social support can further reduce or modify the emotional, physiological, or behavioral responses, and decrease the perceived significance of the problem (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Cohen et al., 2000). In simpler terms, social support moderates the adverse link between stressors and psychological responses to anxiety and stress (Rees et al., 2010, p. 506). Supported by this study, social support can be linked to superior performance (e.g., Freeman & Rees, 2008; Rees & Freeman, 2010; Sarkar & Fletcher 2014a) "in qualitative, experimental, and field research" (Freeman, 2020, p. 453).

6.2 How Riders Perceive Anxiety Affecting the Dyadic Performance

Riders' perceptions of a reciprocal influence of anxiety between themselves and their horses displayed some ambiguity. Some riders believed that their anxiety affected the

horse, and there was substantial evidence that horses could also impact the riders' anxiety, albeit with some remaining uncertainty. Nevertheless, a consistent finding is that rider stress often leads to distinct changes in horse behavior and performance, and it seems plausible that both horses and riders influence each other, as particularly emphasized by Frida. This can potentially exert an influence on the overall dyadic performance.

Research on the relationship and mutual influence between riders and their horses is somewhat limited. Wolframm and Micklewright (2011, p. 186) suggest that there might be an interaction between the moods and emotions of riders and horses due to their close bond, supported by Jarvis (2014). Bridgman's doctoral thesis (2009) delves into this relationship, examining links between anxiety and horse temperament, using heart rate measurements among others. Pretty and Bridgeman (2006) identified a significant correlation between rider-horse cooperation and the synchronization of heart rates, particularly evident during effective training. This synchronization is supported by Keeling et al. (2009). Moreover, the research suggests that a rider's somatic anxiety symptoms can influence their horse's behavior, highlighting the complex relationship between horse behavior and dyadic performance. The research also revealed a correlation between a rider's somatic anxiety symptoms and their horse's temperament. For instance, riders with highly anxious horses experienced more somatic anxiety symptoms. In summary, this emphasizes the mutual influence between horses and riders. Further research is needed to fully comprehend the factors behind this physiological synchronization between the horse and rider (Bridgeman, 2009, p. 131), an area this study provides additional focus on.

Potter's (1996) doctoral thesis on state anxiety in equestrian sport provides valuable insights into the psychological dynamics at play. She introduces the *Negative Performance Cycle*, illustrating a cyclic process where riders' appraisals and physiological responses (arousal) are transferred to the horse, creating tension in the horse and resulting in decreased performance. This, in turn, affects the rider's appraisals and reactions, creating a harmful feedback loop between the rider and the horse (p. 59). Expanding on this concept, Potter explains that a rider's cognitive appraisals are an ongoing process. The rider may interpret the horse's resistance, lack of skill, or incorrect movement patterns negatively, leading to increased anxiety. Importantly, muscle

tension might originate from either the rider or the horse. Initially, horses can become anxious for external reasons, especially in unfamiliar settings like a competition site (p. 58) (as discussed in section 1.2.1).

Obtaining definitive responses from the riders surrounding the dyadic relationship proved challenging. Considering Bridgeman (2009) and Potter (1996) support the concept of mutual anxiety transfer between horses and riders, these discrepancies in responses become more complex. Several factors might contribute to this ambiguity, perhaps primarily due to a lack of awareness. This is particularly noteworthy since many riders provided contradictory statements during the interviews. Furthermore, it's crucial to acknowledge that the riders' interpretations of the situation are pivotal, as Potter (1996, p. 59) highlights. These interpretations can vary significantly among individuals, contributing to the difficulty in arriving at conclusive findings. Additionally, the phrasing of questions and interview techniques utilized may also have played a role in generating uncertain responses. This is a potential limitation, resulting from inexperience.

6.3 How Anxiety (and Fear) Affects the Equestrian Athletes

Consequences of anxiety and fear can be multifaceted. For instance, it impacted the riders' well-being and mental health to a certain extent. These consequences included feelings of embarrassment, accompanied by a lack of enjoyment. On certain occasions, the blend of anxiety and subpar performance triggered riders' thoughts of withdrawing from the competition or briefly contemplating quitting equestrian sports altogether. These reactions are similar to those Fox (2008) calls reactions to escape the uncomfortable stress; "instinctive, subconscious techniques that function to reduce the stress of competition and mask the fear of failure" (p. 173). Fear prompted distinct shifts in behavior among the riders, resulting in either avoidance or hesitation (avoidance coping) when confronted with fear-inducing situations, whether during competition or training. For instance, two riders avoided practicing the exercises they feared, effectively sidestepping what provoked their fear. During competitions, fear acted as a barrier to optimal performance, leading to increased passivity and defensiveness, such as slowing down before specific exercises.

Anxiety and fear also had an impact on performance. This project did not specifically investigate the relationship between anxiety and actual performance, but the general trend suggests that there is no clear correlation between high levels of nervousness and poor performance. For some individuals and in several instances, nerves proved to be detrimental, leading to what is often described as "choking" (Otten, 2009). However, in other cases or under different circumstances, nervousness did not appear to affect performance negatively, and may have even had a positive influence, akin to a "clutch" performance (Otten, 2009). One illustration of how anxiety adversely affected performance was an increase in mistakes. While stress and anxiety are known to have determining effects on performance (e.g., Hardy et al., 1994; Hill et al., 2010), it's crucial to remember that these riders are elite athletes well-versed in high-level competition. They are accustomed to competitive situations and have developed effective coping strategies. With non-elites, anxiety might have had an even more significant detrimental effect on performance.

The relationship between anxiety and equestrian performance has been examined by several, and it is widely agreed that lower levels of anxiety are preferable (e.g., Bridgeman, 2009; Potter, 1996; Trotter and Endler, 1999; Wolframm & Micklewright, 2009; 2010; 2011) - both in terms of somatic and cognitive anxiety. Researchers provide different explanations for this consensus. According to McGreevy (2007) and McGreevy and Boakes (2006), horses learn through classical and operant conditioning, associating the rider's cues with specific responses. A relaxed and confident rider typically leads to accurate execution of desired movements. However, if a rider experiences muscular tension, elevated respiratory or heart rates, along with changes in body position and increased forces (Potter, 1996, p. 57), signals may appear distorted (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2010, p. 34). Horses, relying on non-verbal communication, can detect these changes, as Wolframm and Micklewright (2009) refer to studies by Dierendonck and Goodwin (2005) and Brandt (2004) to emphasize this. This is especially crucial because elite-level exercises require nearly identical cues from the rider, with distinctions lying in minor adjustments in muscular tension or body positioning (Wolframm and Micklewright, 2009, p. 156). Somatic anxiety also causes a stiff rider, resulting in a body moving against the horse's movements, rather than with it in harmony. This can potentially harm the horse and strain its back (Trotter and Endler, 1999, p. 872).

Consequently, the horse may respond differently than intended by the rider, due to somatic anxiety affecting their communication in several ways, decreasing overall performance. This also offers an alternative explanation to the horses' reactions and behavior change to riders' anxiety, as it might arise from misinterpretation of riders' cues, rather than the horses becoming anxious. Therefore, riders should be aware of the results of increases in somatic arousal in fine motor control and communication with the horse. Bridgeman (2009) also emphasizes that cognitive aspects of anxiety can significantly affect a rider's concentration, memory, and focus. If cognitive anxiety begins to impact the rider's decision-making skills, it may hinder their ability to correct the horse's movements or address misbehavior promptly. Therefore, elevated levels of cognitive anxiety may lead to reduced mental performance (pp. 101-102).

Facilitative interpretations have also positively correlated with equestrian performance (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2010). However, it remains unclear how or why these interpretations boost performance, and it is essential to consider their impact on the horse if they do not coincide with a reduction in somatic rider anxiety.

6.4 Applied Implications

The diversities in how performance anxiety is experienced, individual differences in the appraisal process, and coping preferences – highlight the impossibility of one-size-fits-all implications. It is crucial to assess individual anxiety levels and preferences before implementing mental training strategies. Additionally, considering the specific equestrian discipline is essential because each has distinct demands. For instance, MG require calmness between horse and rider, but perhaps more controlled energy (arousal) compared to for example dressage. Equestrian athletes must increase awareness of their emotions, how this influences performance, and recognize the potential influence of human emotions on equine behavior, and vice versa. In essence, enabling effective communication with their equine partners emerges as a fundamental skill for all equestrian athletes to acquire.

Based on the findings and Lazarus and Folkman (1984), adopting a challenge appraisal rather than perceiving the competition setting as a threat is advantageous. In this regard, facilitative interpretations can be related to challenge appraisals. Combining these with

low trait and state anxiety, utilizing techniques such as controlled breathing, visualization, positive self-talk, and enhancing self-efficacy (supported by Wolframm & Micklewright, 2009, p. 159), can be effective. Awareness of one's primary stressors allows individuals to address those using problem-focused strategies, like better planning in some cases. However, emotion-focused approaches like reducing demands or enhancing one's mindset may be necessary.

As MG is a team sport, it is crucial to highlight the significance of team dynamics and social support (e.g., Carron et al., 2002b), as they substantially impact individual and team performance. Specifically, ensuring role clarity and acceptance is positively associated with cohesion and success (e.g., Brawley et al., 1987). Recognizing common team objectives and values, discussing how these align with the team's overarching goals, and prioritizing these values should also be practiced (e.g., Shoenfelt, 2010). Further enhancing team cohesion can include gaining a deeper understanding of each team member's experiences, personal investments, and sense of fulfillment in contributing to the team's mission and responsibilities (Schmidt et al., 2005). The study findings can also be valuable in coaching education, by fostering awareness of how angry and yelling coaches can evoke stress and fear responses, consequently affecting performance. Coaches should also recognize the presence of riders' fears and should tailor coping strategies accordingly.

6.5 Limitations

While the field of research among Norwegian elite equestrian riders remains relatively unexplored, this study offers valuable insights into the experiences of performance anxiety and its interplay with the horse's behavior. However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The data material is influenced by how it is collected (Johannessen et al., 2018, p. 22), which generally can be a limitation of using interviews. What the interviewee shares – is constructed in the interview situation and influenced by the interaction during the conversation. Consequently, interviews provide a means to approach events closely and offer a third-person perspective, but one cannot fully understand how the situations are experienced (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, 2012, p. 20). This underscores the importance of recognizing the positionality of the researcher. My relative inexperience as an interviewer undeniably played a role in this study, despite extensive pilot testing to minimize its impact. Nonetheless, due to the inherent

subjectivity of qualitative research, I have inevitably influenced every aspect of the inquiry, from selecting the topic and participants to data collection methods, interview focus, question formulation, and the analysis and presentation of results. Throughout this process, I have strived to maintain transparency by providing detailed descriptions of my role as a researcher, my personal interest in this subject, and comprehensive explanations of the methodological decisions and procedures.

During transcription, meanings can unintentionally change, and information may be lost due to the language differences between spoken and written forms (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, 2012, p. 34). At times, it was challenging to discern what was being said, particularly in the Zoom interviews. However, this did not significantly impact the results. A fellow student was enlisted to listen to the unclear segments for quality control during transcription. It's worth noting that these segments did not contain personally identifiable information. Despite the difficulties regarding Zoom, it is considered better than other computer-mediated data collection (Archibald et al., 2019), (as mentioned in procedure).

The current study's retrospective design carries the risk of recall bias (Horvath, 1982; Nagurney et al., 2005). What participants shared depended on their memories, and some mentioned that they often forgot negative experiences, while others may have the opposite tendency, recalling negative experiences more vividly. By this, their recollections and focus might be influenced by their performance. Unawareness of their own emotions and nerves can also be a factor, but, on the other hand, this could yield exciting findings. Seeing as appraisal processes may be unconscious decisions, or the person being unaware of the agendas shaping the appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 54), the riders can sometimes be unaware of what or how they felt and why. Although some researchers have suggested using more prospective methods (Gould & Maynard, 2009, pp. 1395–1396), this was not feasible within the time constraints of this research. Future research could consider prospective methods, including observations during training and competitions and potentially integrating heart rate monitoring with prospective interviews. Other quantitative methods could be employed to measure stress in both horses and riders more extensively rather than relying primarily on riders' interpretations and recollections.

Lastly, including only elite athletes resulted in a restricted sample size. While specific themes were consistently expressed by all riders, nearing a state of "saturation," other themes exhibited greater variability in reflections and could have benefited from additional narratives. However it is questioned if this should be a goal in RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2021b), and as discussed in *Participant,* the sample size is within recommendations (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 50). It is important to emphasize that the characteristics of the riders are closely aligned with the study's objectives, necessitating a smaller sample size (Malterud et al., 2015, p. 1755). The sample size was therefore deemed adequate to answer the research questions.

One overarching challenge that emerged during the interviews and subsequent analysis was related to terminology, the absence of a shared language, and comprehension of specific words. The equestrian athletes used various words interchangeably with anxiety, stress, and arousal. These included terms such as competition instinct, seriousness, nervousness, and being "switched on" (Norwegian: *påskruddhet*). To gain a deeper understanding of their intended meanings, I frequently probed for details on how these emotions felt, the accompanying thoughts, and encouraged them to describe contextual situations, often requesting specific examples. A couple of them also acknowledged later in the interviews that what they experienced was a sense of anxiety. This inconsistent use of language might be attributed to their reluctance to employ terms like "anxiety" and "performance anxiety" because they considered them as "big, intimidating" words. There might be different perceptions of the word. Clinical anxiety can be a mood, feeling, emotional response, symptom, syndrome, or illness (Lader, 1986, p. 312), these riders might think of anxiety as an illness rather than an emotional state (Spielberger, 1972, p. 28) and stress response as in this study.

Another reason behind a reluctance to use words like "anxiety" may also relate to image concerns, as they want to project an image of toughness and fearlessness. Elite athletes often perceive performance as highly relevant to their self-image and identity (Anderson et al., 2007). Acknowledging anxiety may be regarded as a weakness, similar to the stigma surrounding seeking sport psychology support (Martin et al., 1997). Hughes and Coakley (1991) address the sporting norms to praise toughness and the *sport ethic*, encompassing "definitions of what it means to be a *true athlete*" (p. 308), which includes making sacrifices, embracing risks, and persevering through pain. Awareness

regarding anxiety, exploring athletes understanding of the terms, and a possible reluctance in language usage can be explored in future research, as well as the influence of image. Inconsistencies in terminology and definitions might be regarded as limitations of this study, although, it is also commonly recognized as a challenge in the stress/anxiety literature (Lazarus, 1999).

7.0 Conclusion

The current study examined how Mounted games riders of the Norwegian national team (1) experienced and coped with performance anxiety, and (2) the influence of horse behavior on riders' anxiety, and vice versa. The experiences varied throughout the themes of stressor, symptoms, trait and state anxiety, interpretation, and fright. Overall, the study revealed that both performance anxiety and fear manifested at different times. This increases a need to avoid one-size-fits-all implications.

There were differing opinions on whether riders perceive that the horse is affected by the rider's anxiety, and whether the horse's behavior increases anxiety in the rider. Much suggests that horses and riders influence each other, as evident in this study's findings and prior research. It also seems that there might be a lack of awareness regarding this dynamic. Increasing riders' awareness of their anxiety and its potential influence on the horse emerges as a crucial consideration. Factors like the horse's temperament, sensitivity, and experience appear to mediate this interaction. Generally, it appears that further research in this area is warranted. Research in the domain of equestrian sport anxiety typically focuses on the effects of anxiety on performance, consistently suggesting that lower levels of anxiety are advantageous for performance. However, research often overlooks how anxiety is experienced and the dynamic interaction between horse and rider, as explored in this study.

Key coping strategies involved effective utilization of mental techniques (visualization, breathing, and positive self-talk), established routines, as well as experience and communication. It was also found that the team can function as both a coping mechanism and a stressor.

Take home message: Enhance riders' understanding of anxiety, problem-focused coping, and the stress process, as well as their impact on the dyadic performance.

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Appendices
Appendix A: Athlete Consent Form

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

«Prestasjonsangst i ridning»?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å undersøke hvordan ryttere opplever konkurransenerver og prestasjonsangst. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål
Forskningsprosjektet er en masteroppgave som ønsker å undersøke rytteres opplevelse av konkurransenerver og prestasjonsangst gjennom intervju. Videre undersøkes det om ryttere opplever at hesten påvirker nerver og prestasjonsangst, samt rytternes påvirkning på hesten.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?
Norges Idrettshøgskole, institutt for samfunn og idrettsvitenskap er ansvarlig for prosjektet. Veiledere og prosjektansvarlige er Frank Abrahamsen og Henrik Gustafsson.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?
Som rytter på landslagsnivå ansees du som relevant for prosjektet, da du har erfaring med trening og konkurranser i Mounted games. Studien ønsker totalt 6-9 ryttere.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?
Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, innebærer det at du deltar i et intervju, med mulighet for oppfølgingsintervju. Intervjuet vil vare tilsvarende 60 minutter. Intervjuet inneholder spørsmål om opplevelser fra trenings og konkurransesituasjoner. Jeg tar lydopptak og notater fra intervjuet.

Foreldre til barn under 18 år kan få innsyn i intervjuguiden på forhånd ved å ta kontakt.

Det er frivillig å delta
Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger
Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.
- Veiledere Frank Abrahamsen og Henrik Gustafsson vil ha tilgang på opplysningene.
- *Navn vil oppbevares atskilt fra forskningsdata, og forskningsdata oppbevares på egen innelåst harddisk.*

Som deltager vil du ikke kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjon.

Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?
Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes når oppgaven blir godkjent [prosjektslutt regnes 1. januar 2024]. Etter prosjektslutt vil datamaterialet med dine personopplysninger slettes.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?
Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Norges Idrettshøgskole har Personverntjenester vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter
Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:
- innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:
- Norges Idrettshøgskole ved Frank Abrahamsen (frankea@nih.no), Henrik Gustafsson (henrik.gustafsson@kau.se) eller Kristine Gjulem (dmukristineg@gmail.com).
- Vårt personvernombud: personvernombud@nih.no

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til Personverntjenester sin vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med:
- Personverntjenester på epost (personverntjenester@sikt.no) eller på telefon: 53 21 15 00.

Med vennlig hilsen

Frank Abrahamsen, Henrik Gustafsson   *Kristine Gjulem*
(Forskere/veiledere)   (Student)

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet «Prestasjonsangst i ridning», og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

☐ å delta i intervju

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

----
(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Under 18: Forelder/verge samtykker til at opplysningene til barnet behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

----

Intervjuguide:

hvordan ryttere opplever angst, om hesten som en prestasjonsvariabel påvirker denne angsten, om rytterne opplever at deres angst påvirker hesten.

Starte bredt og gå mer spesifikt. Beskriv alt du husker- også gå dypere. Spørre om lukt og lyd og andre ting som hjelper huske.

Innledning:

Fortell litt om ridningen, hvor lenge har du holdt på.

Hva liker du med Mounted games

Fortell litt om hesten

Er det noe du ikke liker?

Er det noe som skaper stress eller nerver?

Opplevelsen av prestasjonsangst og hvordan det påvirker prestasjon:

- Hvordan opplever du konkurransesituasjonen?
- Beskriv en typisk konkurransedag, begynn på begynnelsen og gjerne fortell så detaljert som mulig. Er du ofte rolig eller ikke? Hva tenker du? Hva føler du?
- Har du opplevd nerver, stress? Finn en spesifikk situasjon hvor du opplevde mye av dette. -hva skjedde, når og hvorfor- fortell alt som skjedde.
    - Hvordan oppleves nervene?
- Hva skjedde, hvorfor var det stressende?
- Når kommer nervene? (Uken før?, dagen før, samme dag, timene før?)
- Kan nervene også komme på treninger, eller er det kun konkurranser?
- Hva skulle vært annerledes for at nervene ikke kommer?
- Hva skulle til for at du ikke skulle blitt stress i den situasjonen. – har du en konkurranse eller situasjon som var minst stressende- din beste prestasjon
    - Beskriv hele dagen
    - Hvorfor tror du det ikke var like stressende
    - Hva er forskjellen på denne dagen og en stressende dag?
    - Beskriv en ideel konkurransedag

Opplevelsen av at hesten påvirker rytterens angst

1

- Merker du at hesten noen ganger er stresset?
- Føler/ opplever du at dettte påvirker deg ?
- Hvis hesten er stresset, skvetten, spent i kroppen, opplever du at dette gjøre deg mer nervøs og stresset. – hvordan opplever du det? Hvordan forholder du deg til det?
- Hvis hesten er sliten og trøtt, merker du at dette påvirker dine nerver og stress?

Opplevelsen av at egen angst påvirker hesten
- I hvilken grad føler du at ditt humør og sinnsstemning påvirker hesten?
- Har du noen gang tenkt at hesten er stresset fordi du er det?
- I situasjoner der du er stresset og er nervøs, har du opplevd at dette påvirker hesten?
- Tror du at dine nerver og følelser smitter over på hesten?
- Hvordan har du merket dette?

Mestringsstrategier.
- Har du noen strategier du bruker for å håndtere det?
  - Hva gjør du for å prøve å gjøre situasjonen bedre?
- Har du en ide om hva som skal til for at du presterer bra?
- Hvordan ser det ut når alt flyter?
- Hva kunne du gjort i situasjoner for å håndtere det bedre?
  - Har du noen tanker om hva du kunne gjort annerledes for å gjøre situasjonen bedre?
- Hvis de var venninne/kompis som fortalte deg at ed følte det sånn, hva hvilke du sagt til dem? Har du noen tips du ville gitt videre?
- Du nevnte har dette trigger deg, er du noe du kan gjøre for å håndtere det bedre?

2

Regulations for Using Zoom to Collect Research Data

Rutine for bruk av Zoom til innsamling av forskningsdata ved NIH

1. Virkeområde for denne rutinen

Denne rutinen gjelder for all bruk av Zoom som omfatter eller behandler persondata klassifisert som oransje eller røde etter instruksen «Om eierskap og klassifisering av data ved NIH - hvordan vurdere hvilken klasse du skal bruke». Rutinen gjelder for all bruk av Zoom i forskningsprosjekter ved NIH.

Merk: det er ikke tillatt å benytte Zoom utenfor NIH (https://nih.zoom.us) til innsamling av forskningsdata.

2. Forutsetninger

2.1 Tekniske forutsetninger

- Man skal kun bruke NIH sin variant av Zoom, som bruker NIH-bruker ID og Feideinnlogging (SSO), på adressen https://nih.zoom.us/
- Den parten som er ansvarlig for samtalen og eventuelt opptak skal kun benytte NIH-eid og -driftet utstyr.
- Utstyret skal være godkjent for behandling av oransje og røde data etter NIHs retningslinjer for lagring.

2.2 Andre forutsetninger

- Den som er ansvarlig for samtalen skal ha satt seg inn i, og følge, hele denne rutinen.
- Eventuelle unntak av hele eller deler av denne rutinen skal være godkjent av avdelingsleder IT ved NIH.
- Skal det gjøres opptak skal det innhentes godkjenning fra kan bare lagres på utstyr eid-, satt opp- og driftet av NIH.

- Den som er ansvarlig for prosjektet, dvs. prosjektleder, skal sikre at alle godkjenninger er på plass.
- **Merk**: Gjennomføres samtalen som en erstatning av fysisk møte i forskningsprosjekter, så kan det være nødvendig med endringsmelding til NSD.

3. Gjennomføring av zoom-intervjuer med oransje- eller rødt innhold

Punktene under skal følges for gjennomføring av alle zoom-møter til innsamling av data med oransje eller rødt innhold. Punktene som spesifikt gjelder opptak kan en se bort fra om det ikke tas opptak.

3.1 Før intervjuet starter

- Send ut informasjonskriv og samtykkeerklæring før datainnsamling starter, slik at informert samtykke er på plass før intervjuet.
- Til gjennomføring av intervju kan bare utstyr eid-, satt opp- og driftet av NIH brukes.
- Den som er ansvarlig for intervjuet skal ha gjort seg kjent med Zoom som verktøy og testet at alt virker uten sensitivt innhold. Det skal benyttes generert møte-ID, ikke ens personlige møte-ID. Bruk funksjonen «Generate automatically». Denne ID-en skal kun formidles til de som skal delta i møtet. Merk at om kalender i Outlook eller lignende benyttes for å kalle inn deltakere, så skal ikke møte-ID ligge åpent. Den må enten utelates fra innkallingen, eller innkallingen må settes privat.
- Møter skal passordbeskyttes. Passord for møter skal ikke gjenbrukes og kun oversendes de som skal ha tilgang til møtet. Det skal benyttes venteromsfunksjon for å slippe inn bare riktige deltagere. Dette heter «Enable waiting room», og er ikke det samme som «Breakout room».
- Om det skal benyttes deling av skjerm for å vise frem tekst eller bilde, sørg for å stenge ned e-post, andre dokumenter og/eller andre programmer for å minske risiko for deling av feil innhold.
- Om chatte-funksjonen ikke er strengt nødvendig for gjennomføring av møtet – så skal funksjonen skrues av.
- Gjør klar påkrevd informasjon som skal gis til deltakere før møtet starter.
- Påse at det ikke er fare for lydlekkasje der samtalen utføres. Sikre at lyd ikke overhøres av uvedkommende. Hodetelefoner bør benyttes der det er praktisk mulig.
- Påse at uvedkommende ikke har innsyn til skjermen under samtalen.

3.2 Spesifikke tillegg dersom det skal gjøres opptak

- Opptak kan bare lagres på utstyr eid-, satt opp- og driftet av NIH. Opptaket transkriberes så raskt som mulig. Deretter skal opptaket med en gang slettes eller lagres i NIHs sikre sone for forskningsdata.

- Gjør klar egnet lagringssted for opptak på NIH PC som skal brukes. Dersom opptak skal lagres i NIHs sikre sone for forskningsdata, må du sørge for at det er lagt til rette for dette (registrer prosjektet i Prosjektweb, og ta kontakt med IT avdelingen).

- Navngi mapper eller filer med opptak entydig så det er lett å holde orden, men unngå personidentifiserende navn på disse.

- Det kan være lurt å skru på funksjonen «Add a timestamp to the recording» for å lette navigering i sluttført opptak for evt. klipping eller sladding av deler av opptaket.

- Vurdér om det skal benyttes «virtual background» for å hindre at andre personer, bakgrunn og/eller dokumenter kommer med på opptaket.

3.3 Under samtalen / opptaket

- Når deltaker(e) er sluppet inn i møtet, sjekk at det ikke er deltakere som ikke skal være der.

- Om det er uvedkommende inne i møtet, avslutt straks møtet og IT avdelingen om avviket.

- Sjekk at alle innstillinger er satt som ønsket – for eksempel at chat er skrudd av om den ikke skal brukes osv.

- Lås møtet.

- Noen deltagere ønsker kanskje ikke å fremstå med reelt navn i opptak. Dersom det skal benyttes chat eller deling av skjerm, vurder å be deltakere endre navn i møtet.

- Om det skal gjøres opptak, gi informasjon om dette og annen påkrevd informasjon.

- Informér om chat skal benyttes eller ikke, og om den skal lagres eller ikke.

- Om det hender eller sies noe under møtet som må fjernes i etterkant, legg merke til tidspunktet for lettere å kunne klippe/sladde.

- Om det ikke gjøres opptak, men en tar notater av møtet/samtalen så merk at notatene kan ha samme klassifisering som samtalen.

3.4 Etter samtalen / opptaket

- Når samtalen er over – stopp opptaket.

- Avslutt møtet ved å klikke på «End» og velg «End Meeting for All» for å sikre at alle blir stengt ute fra møtet.

- Om det er gjort opptak så kan maskinen trenge noe tid på å behandle opptaket. La maskinen gjøre seg ferdig før du lukker lokket eller skrur av datamaskinen.

- Sjekk at opptak har blitt lagret på ønsket sted, og at du vet hvor det ligger.

- Slett eventuell unødig informasjon. For eksempel kan lydfiler slettes om man kun skal benytte video.

- Du må så raskt som mulig slette opptaket (etter transkribering), eller overføre det til NIHs sikre sone for lagring av forskningsdata.

Appendix D: Classification of Data

Om eierskap og klassifisering av data ved NIH - hvordan vurdere hvilken klasse du skal bruke

All informasjon skal ha en entydig og identifiserbar eier. Det skal være mulig å finne ut hvem som er ansvarlig for at informasjonen er vedlikeholdt, oppdatert og riktig merket. Eier av informasjonen er ansvarlig for de vurderinger som ligger til grunn for plasseringen i en gitt kategori. Der det ikke kan identifiseres en eier, er administrerende direktør ansvarlig for informasjonen.

Eieren av informasjonen er ansvarlig for å:

- Sikre at informasjonen er plassert i riktig klasse ut ifra disse reglene.
- Gjøre en vurdering når informasjonen *bytter* klasse.
- Påse at all lagring, behandling og bearbeiding av informasjon foregår på tekniske løsninger som er godkjent for dette.
- Regelmessig sjekke at man oppfyller eventuelle *endringer* i kravene.

Informasjonen skal alltid plasseres i en tilstrekkelig sikker klasse. På NIH har vi fire klasser data, grønn, gul, oransje og rød. Dersom du er i tvil om du skal velge å klassifisere data, f. eks. oransje eller gul, skal du velge høyeste nivå, altså oransje.

Åpen eller fritt tilgjengelig (Grønn):

Informasjon som *kan* eller *skal* være tilgjengelig for alle uten særskilte tilgangsrettigheter.

Mye av den informasjonen NIH forvalter er åpen, enten som konsekvens av mål og hensikt med NIHs virksomhet eller som resultat av pålegg om åpenhet i lov, forskrift og annet regelverk som regulerer offentlig forvaltning og virksomhet. Andre deler av informasjonen har ingen krav om beskyttelse selv om den ikke ligger åpent tilgjengelig.

Denne klassen benyttes dersom det ikke forårsaker noen skade for NIH eller samarbeidspartner dersom informasjonen blir kjent for uvedkommende.

Eksempler på slik informasjon er:

- En web-side som presenterer en avdeling, et kurs eller en enhet som legges åpent ut på internett.
- Studiemateriell som ligger åpent, men som er merket med en gitt lisens og/eller opphavsrett.
- Forskningsdata som ikke trenger noen beskyttelse (forskeren står ansvarlig for denne vurderingen).
- Undervisningsmateriell som ikke trenger noen beskyttelse (underviseren står ansvarlig for denne vurderingen).
- Administrative dokumenter/arbeidsdokumenter som ikke trenger noen beskyttelse.

Merk at selv om noe av denne informasjonen skal være *tilgjengelig* for alle, skal likevel informasjonens integritet sikres ved at kun personer og brukere med riktige rettigheter har tilgang til å *endre* informasjonen. Merk også at selv om informasjonen kan være åpen, er det ikke fritt frem å velge hva du gjør med den.

Begrenset (Gul):

Dette er informasjon som ikke er åpen for alle. I lover eller annet regelverk er det ingen krav om at informasjonen av denne kategori skal være åpen. Dette er altså all informasjon som ikke er klassifisert som åpen, fortrolig, eller sensitiv.

Informasjonen må ha en viss beskyttelse og kan være tilgjengelig for både eksterne og interne, med kontrollerte tilgangsrettigheter. Denne klassen benyttes dersom det vil kunne forårsake en viss skade for NIH eller samarbeidspartner dersom informasjonen blir kjent for uvedkommende. Informasjonen har kun relevans for eller er innrettet mot en begrenset brukergruppe enten ved NIH eller ved institusjoner og organisasjoner NIH har samarbeid med.

Eksempler på slik informasjon kan være:

- De fleste administrative dokumenter eller andre arbeidsdokumenter.
- Informasjon som er unntatt offentlighet.
- Mange typer av personopplysninger.
- Karakterer.
- Studentarbeider.
- Eksamensbesvarelser.
- Upubliserte forskningsdata og –arbeider.

Fortrolig (Oransje):

Dette er informasjon som NIH er pålagt å begrense tilgangen til i lov, forskrift, avtaler, reglementer og annet regelverk. Fortrolig benyttes hvis det vil forårsake skade for offentlige interesser, NIH, enkeltperson eller samarbeidspartner dersom informasjonen blir kjent for uvedkommende.

Eksempler på slik informasjon kan være:

- Personalmapper.
- En del informasjon om f. eks. sikring av bygninger og IT-systemer.
- Forskningsdata og datasett av stor økonomisk verdi.

Sensitiv (Rød):

Dette er informasjon som NIH er pålagt å begrense tilgangen til i henholdt til lov om behandling av personopplysninger med tilhørende forskrift.

Eksempler på slik informasjon kan være:

- Sensitive personopplysninger (inklusive helseopplysninger).

Lagringsguide

Denne guiden forteller hvor du kan *behandle*, *lagre*, og *bearbeide* informasjon.

	Åpen	Begrenset	Fortrolig	Sensitiv
Lagring på lokale systemer				
Privateid datamaskin, nettbrett eller mobiltelefon (BYOD)	•	(7)		
NIH-eid hjemmemaskin (4)	•	(7)		
NIH-driftet datamaskin - ikke kryptert (4)	•	•		
NIH-driftet datamaskin – kryptert (4)	•	•	(1) (3)	
Minnepinne/ekstern harddisk	•			
Minnepinne/ekstern harddisk - kryptert	•	•	(1) (3)	
E-post				
Personlig e-post (Gmail, Hotmail eller liknende) (8)	•			
NIHs e-post (Exchange, Office 365)	•	•	(2) (3)	
Lagringstjenester				
Personlig skytjeneste (Dropbox, Google drive eller liknende)	•			
NIH Hjemmeområde («H:-disken»)	•	(6)		
NIH Fellesområde for NIH, seksjon eller avdeling (filområde eller i Sharepoint)	•	•	(5)	

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Appendix E: Approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data

Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger

🖨 Skriv ut   ⬚ 31.08.2022 ▾

Referansenummer
986739

Vurderingstype
Standard

Dato
31.08.2022

Tittel
Prestasjonsangst i ridning

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon
Norges idrettshøgskole / Institutt for idrett og samfunnsvitenskap

Prosjektansvarlig
Frank Eirik Abrahamsen

Student
Kristine Gjulem

Prosjektperiode
01.09.2022 – 01.01.2024

Kategorier personopplysninger
Alminnelige

Lovlig grunnlag
Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Behandlingen av personopplysningene er lovlig så fremt den gjennomføres som oppgitt i meldeskjemaet. Det lovlige grunnlaget gjelder til 01.01.2024.

Meldeskjema ⬀

Kommentar
OM VURDERINGEN
Personverntjenester har en avtale med institusjonen du forsker eller studerer ved. Denne avtalen innebærer at vi skal gi deg råd slik at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet ditt er lovlig etter personvernregelverket.

Personverntjenester har nå vurdert den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at behandlingen er lovlig, hvis den gjennomføres slik den er beskrevet i meldeskjemaet med dialog og vedlegg.

VIKTIG INFORMASJON TIL DEG
Du må lagre, sende og sikre dataene i tråd med retningslinjene til din institusjon. Dette betyr at du må bruke leverandører for spørreskjema, skylagring, videosamtale o.l. som institusjonen din har avtale med. Vi gir generelle råd rundt dette, men det er institusjonens egne retningslinjer for informasjonssikkerhet som gjelder.

DEL PROSJEKTET MED PROSJEKTANSVARLIG

For studenter er det obligatorisk å dele prosjektet med prosjektansvarlig (veileder). Del ved å trykke på knappen «Del prosjekt» i menylinjen øverst i meldeskjemaet. Prosjektansvarlig bes akseptere invitasjonen innen en uke. Om invitasjonen utløper, må han/hun inviteres på nytt.

TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET

Prosjektet vil behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til den datoen som er oppgitt i meldeskjemaet.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 og 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a.

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

Personverntjenester vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om:

lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen

formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke behandles til nye, uforenlige formål

dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet

lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), og dataportabilitet (art. 20).

Personverntjenester vurderer at informasjonen om behandlingen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

Personverntjenester legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

Ved bruk av databehandler (spørreskjemaleverandør, skylagring eller videosamtale) må behandlingen oppfylle kravene til bruk av databehandler, jf. art 28 og 29. Bruk leverandører som din institusjon har avtale med.

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og/eller rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER

Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til oss ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilke type endringer det er nødvendig å melde: https://www.nsd.no/personverntjenester/fylle-ut-meldeskjema-for-personopplysninger/melde-endringer-i-meldeskjema

Du må vente på svar fra oss før endringen gjennomføres.

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

Personverntjenester vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Appendix F: Visual Representation of the Thematic Analysis

Figure 1

Visual Representation of the Thematic Analysis.