Equestrian partnerships:
A qualitative investigation of the relationship between horse and rider in elite equestrian sports

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Certificate of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material that to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. Any contributions made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

I agree that the thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Division of Library Services or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of theses.

Name: Rachel Caroline Hogg

Date: 27 March 2015

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ETHICS APPROVAL

Memo

To: Rachel Hogg

From: Andrew McGrath, Chair, Ethics Committee, School of Psychology

Date: 15 April 2010

Re: Ethics application 2010/13

Dear Rachel

The School of Psychology Ethics Committee considered your application at its recent meeting and approved your research subject to the following:

- Please change the address on the information sheet and consent forms to reflect the fact that the School of Psychology Ethics Committee approved this research. The relevant address should be:

  The Presiding Officer
  School of Psychology Ethics Committee
  Panorama Avenue
  Bathurst 2795

  Tel: 6338 4061
  Fax: 6338-4401

PUBLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The horse-rider relationship is widely regarded as an important dimension of equestrian sport, yet little psychological research has addressed the dynamics of this sporting relationship. This thesis examined the relationship between horse and rider in elite equestrian sport using a social constructionist grounded theory methodology. Symbolic interactionism was utilized as an appropriate theoretical lens through which to examine the phenomena at hand, with an argument made for the relevance of human-animal relationships within symbolic interactionist theory. Thirty-six in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted and analysed using an international sample of twenty-nine elite riders, four former elite riders, and three sub-elite riders from a range of equestrian sporting disciplines. The purpose of the study was to generate the beginnings of a substantive theory of the horse-rider relationship in elite equestrian sport. The study examined the ways in which participants constructed and managed their relationships with horses and accorded status to horses and their relationships with them. The implications of the horse-rider relationship for the competitiveness of equestrian dyads were also addressed, as were constructions of "partnership" between horse and rider. The findings of the study suggest that the relationship between horse and rider is fundamental, but also increasingly contested in an elite sporting context. Participants experienced complex, close, embodied relationships with important horses in their lives that crossed the boundary between personal- and professional-relational dynamics, with an emphasis on shared work and relational intimacy. The complexity of the horse-rider relationship was elucidated through narratives of emotion-, communication-, and conflict-based exchanges between horse and rider and with reference to the interdependency and vulnerability that characterizes horse-rider relationships. Participants experienced their horses as minded, powerful, intelligent agents, according individuality and personhood to horses in ways that served to minimize the species gap and create a sense of equality that facilitated sporting participation and the development of a close horse-rider relationship. Participants recognised the inherent inequality of the horse-rider relationship, however, leading to an emphasis on rider responsibility and control over horse-rider interaction. The horse-rider "partnership" centred on mutual goals and a shared work-orientation, but incorporated personal aspects of horse-rider interaction as well, symbolizing the ultimate form of relationship between horse and rider. A strong horse-rider relationship could enhance sporting performances, but was not always necessary to succeed competitively, with a

number of factors affecting sporting performance. In certain contexts, a strong relationship appeared to be an impediment to competitive success, bringing into question the ethical and political dimensions of equestrian sport. These findings are preliminary and further theoretical sampling is required to develop a theoretical framework of horse-rider relationships in elite equestrian sport, however, a dynamic and salient nascent theory that has relevance for the moral and ethical status of equestrian sports has been presented. Equestrian sporting disciplines must be examined to determine why, and under what circumstances, a partnership between horse and rider may become antithetical to performance success. Strong horse-rider relationships may be pivotal to the development of an equestrian sporting milieu that values and prioritises the lives and welfare of horses.

Chapter 1 Charting New Territory

1.1 Reflections of an Amateur Rider

My academic interest in horse-human relationships is deeply grounded in my own personal experience of horses and equestrianism. I was seven years old when my parents bought me and my two sisters a pony. Two more ponies followed, and our days of designing cross-country courses out of broomsticks and mop buckets and jumping them ourselves were over. My first pony, Bonnie, was unsuited to a young novice rider and brought more pain than pleasure, but nothing dissuaded me from wanting to ride. I loved Bonnie, as I loved all horses, but her unpredictability and my growing fear did not foster a healthy beginning. Our relationship became a matter of survival as I was repeatedly bucked off or dumped after she bolted, and I suspect that Bonnie too was much happier in her next life as a broodmare than she was as a riding pony. Sad as I was to see her get sold, I recognised the unsuitability of the arrangement, though I recall throughout my childhood and teenage years never easily accepting my parent's decision to sell unsuitable horses, such was my attachment to them.

It was with my second pony, Carlson, that I first experienced a trusting and enjoyable horse-rider relationship. A reticent grey Welsh pony, Carlson had been abused and was severely malnourished, infested with lice and worms, and dangerously underweight. Once established in his new home, Carlson's physical restoration was relatively straightforward; the psychological damage that had resulted from the abuse he had experienced was much less easily repaired. He was terrified of men, and mistrusting and suspicious of humans all-round. At just eight years of age, I did not see it as my mission to restore his confidence in humankind. I just loved horses and I loved him. Over time, my confidence in horses returned and Carlson became a happier, healthier pony, though he always bore the emotional and physical scars of his past life. Despite his typically reserved, churlish tendencies toward people and physical laziness, the bond between us was deep and, I believe, mutual. When I outgrew him and moved onto a bigger horse, he would turn away when I approached him, especially if I was with my new pony, Andy, until after around twelve months, he forgave me. Now in his mid-twenties and a happy retiree, the bond between us remains.

Other horses followed, in particular, a bay Quarter Horse-Thoroughbred cross, King, whom I rode until he became sick just as we had begun to seriously pursue dressage. His reliance on human beings to care for him while acutely ill with Ross River Fever

seemed to draw out qualities in him that defied what I had associated with animal behaviour. My mother often comments, “He’s virtually human, that horse….” King is highly intelligent and strong-willed, with an affinity for humans and other animals, and despite the deterioration in his health, he has maintained his status as “paddock boss.” During the fifteen years we have owned him, he has demonstrated an awareness that seemed to transcend the mental and emotional limits of animals. I will never forget the expression on his face when we took away the body of one his paddock mates, Andy, who had died from snakebite, nor the time he helped us goad Chance, seriously ill with colic, to stand up. He has always been gentle with children, wilful and inquisitive with adults, affectionate and interested in everything going on around him. If we only get one great equine love of a lifetime, then I have experienced it with him.

I am not the most talented rider in my family, but I am good at getting the best out of different horses. With my two sisters, I competed at Pony Club and then at the lower levels of the Equestrian Federation Australia (EFA) dressage system, but King’s illness, university and work commitments have increasingly left little time for competitive riding, though my interest in horses has never been driven by deep sporting ambitions. That said, watching the Australian eventing team bring home a gold medal at the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 was an exhilarating experience. I was equally awed four years before this watching Australian eventer, Gillian Rolton, finish the cross-country phase of the three-day eventing competition at the Atlanta Olympics. Two falls and a broken collarbone later, her completion of the course was instrumental in securing a gold medal for the Australian team. Rolton later attributed this performance to her relationship with Peppermint Grove and his willingness to continue jumping and galloping across an Olympic level cross-country course with minimal guidance from his rider. A number of equestrian dyads shaped my childhood exposure to competitive equestrian sport, including Lucinda Green and Regal Realm, Mary King and King William, Isabel Werth and Gigolo, and Nicole Uphoff and Rembrandt. While Lucinda achieved remarkable success with a number of horses, Nicole Uphoff, never seemed to replicate the success she experienced with Rembrandt. I grew up hearing sporting commentators and riders referring to the “partnership” between horse and rider, but it was not until I began my PhD that I began to look more deeply into the implications of the language used to describe equestrian dyads.

My love of horses spills into every part of my life, yet I have not loved, or even liked, all the horses that I have worked with. It is the relationships I have had with a small number of horses over a lengthy period of time that have carried personal significance and

meaning. Those horses have been a source of inspiration, solace, companionship, fun, and attachment and, along with equestrian sport, represent a relatively straightforward part of my life, a reprieve from work and other pressures. This is not to say that the relationships I have experienced with horses have not been complex, to the contrary, they have involved a multiplicity of emotions and experiences, but as an amateur rider, my sporting performances do not matter beyond the personal fulfilment I gain from making improvements or progressing from one competitive level to the next. For me, horses are a source of pleasure and the relationships I experience with them are what motivate me to participate in equestrian sport.

1.2 Phenomena for Inquiry

What characterises the relationship between horse and rider in an elite sporting context and how important is this relationship to elite performances? Is it possible as an elite rider to elicit performances from horses regardless of the depth of relationship between horse and rider? Does the horse-rider relationship change as elite horses become increasingly expensive (Coulter, 2013), and riders are increasingly expected to succeed quickly and consistently as professional riders (Dashper, 2014)? And how does the language used to describe horses and horse-rider relationships influence our understanding of interspecies relationships in sport?

While research has addressed the general significance and meaning of the horse-rider relationship, and some studies have addressed the relationship between horse and rider in a competitive context, only a small body of literature exists concerning the relationship between horse and rider in an elite context. As Dashper (2014) contends, the elite sporting context is replete with unique challenges for horse-rider dyads, and some of these dynamics bring into question the meaning and significance, as well as the status, of the relationship between horse and rider in sport. These dynamics include the professionalization of elite equestrian sport, wherein financial investments from third parties such as sponsors and horse owners may place additional pressure on riders to achieve success. Catch-riding practices may also carry implications for the relationship between horse and rider in elite sport, while risk has been identified as a salient issue in equestrian sports (Thompson & Nesci, 2013) and arguably nowhere more so than at the elite level (van Gilder Cooke, 2012). These factors will be briefly outlined below before being addressed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Elite riders commonly ride as professionals, meaning their primary source of income is generated from interaction with horses, and as elite equestrian sport becomes increasingly commercialised (Dashper, 2014) this pressure is arguably increasing. Some have argued that an increased pressure to achieve performance outcomes quickly and in ways that may be antithetical to the formation of a strong relationship between horse and rider has begun to pervade modern equestrian sport (Dashper, 2014), leading to compromises in horse-training and welfare (Heuschmann, 2011), while equestrian sports are coming under increasing scrutiny with respect to horse welfare and safety (cf. Campbell, 2013b; McLean & McGreevy, 2010a). While participating in equestrian sports at any level may mean jeopardising the welfare of one's horse, elite horses are arguably placed under greater mental and physical pressure than any other category of horses ridden for sport or pleasure (van Gilder Cooke, 2012). The horse-rider relationship has been heralded as critical to performance success (Pretty & Bridgeman, 2005; Tompkins & Pretty, 2000; Visser et al., 2008; Whitaker & Whitelaw, 2007), yet the connection between these factors, and horse welfare, deserves careful consideration, particularly in an elite sporting context.

In addition to the commercialisation of equestrian sport, it is not uncommon to see elite-level riders compete horses at major international competitions after only having ridden the horse once or twice before, a practice commonly referred to as "catch-riding." This phenomenon brings into question the importance of a well-established horse-rider relationship to competitive success. As documented in Chapter Three, some showjumping competitions require top riders to compete on horses with whom they are largely unfamiliar, while internationally renowned eventing rider, Mark Todd (1998, 2012) has competed and won at Badminton Horse Trials, regarded the most challenging three-day event in the world, on a horse he had only ridden for twenty minutes prior to the competition (Todd, 1998). Such anecdotes suggest that the ability to establish relationships with multiple horses in short spaces of time may be advantageous for an elite competitor, while highly talented elite riders may uniquely capable of engaging in catch-riding. Finally, equestrian sport has relatively high rates of serious injuries and mortalities (Cripps & Pagano, 2002; Johnson, 2014) such that the incidence rate of accidents and fatalities in equestrian sport is relatively low in comparison to other sports, but the severity and potential lethality of these accidents is high.

While these factors are not all exclusive to elite sports, many of them carry particular implications for elite riders. Yet it may be argued that riders form similar

relationships with horses despite the pressures faced by elite riders in comparison to their amateur counterparts. In an interview for the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) (FEI, 2014 August 24, 35:00-37:00 minutes). Chef d'équipe for the American Reining Team, Jeff Petsaka states:

> I think all of our riders...they invest a lot of time and money and emotion in these horses. You have to keep in mind that we all started this just because we love horses and that doesn't change, it['s] just, the level at which we compete might change, but at the end of the day, the thing that binds us all together…is just the fact that when we were little kids we just couldn't stay away from them [horses].

Perhaps the value and the meaning of the horse to a rider does not change across different levels of equestrian sport, yet to overlook the potential influence of structural factors such as the professionalization of elite sports on the relationship between horse and rider may be to overlook critical dimensions of this interaction. Implicit in the notion of riding for the love of horses is the expectation that the relationship between horse and rider in equestrian sport should be of a personal nature. Riders may become interested in sport "for the love of horses," but to what extent does this imperative continue to influence professional athletes as they navigate a career that revolves around competitive success with horses? As equestrian sport comes under increasing pressure to defend the moral and ethical risks of sporting participation, the financial cost of owning elite horses increases, and the welfare of performance horses comes under heightened scrutiny, all aspects of equestrian sport must be examined to determine how sporting participation shapes human-animal interaction and the implications this has for both horse and rider as individuals, as well as the relationship between them.

Elite equestrian athletes may be considered expert on the establishment of a horse-rider relationship, if, as is widely suggested in both scientific and lay literature, the relationship between horse and rider is critical to performance success. Insomuch as this is the case, they represent a source of expert knowledge on the development and maintenance of strong horse-rider relationships. They may also influence the status quo at lower levels of equestrian sport, given that what limited coverage non-racing equestrian sports receive in the media usually centres around elite level competitions such as the Olympic Games, making horse-rider relationships in elite sport more visible than at any other level of the sport.

1.3 Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between horse and rider in an elite sporting context. Whilst the focus of this study rests on elite equestrian dyads and a number of distinctions between amateur and elite riding contexts have been outlined, it is acknowledged that the findings of the study may have implications for both amateur and elite riders, as well as for horse-human interaction in a multiplicity of contexts. This thesis also examined the status of the horse in elite sport, the meanings attributed to the horse-human relationship by elite riders, and manner in which these relationships function in a competitive context. I was interested in exploring discourses around the horse-rider partnership, an oft-used phrase to describe the relationship between horse and rider (cf. Evans & Franklin, 2010; Fox-Pitt, 2009; Funnell, 2005; Hester, 2014; King, 1998; Pretty & Bridgeman, 2005; Smart, 2011; Todd, 1998, 2012; Whitaker & Whitelaw, 2007; Wipper, 2000). In investigating the language used by riders to describe their relationships with horses, it is argued that a deeper understanding of the characteristics that shape horse-rider interaction in a sporting context may be reached and the constructions we draw about horses further illuminated. Questions of power and control also pervade discourses of horse-human interaction (Bartle & Newsum, 2004), resulting in tensions and ambiguities that highlight the complexity of interspecies relationships and these dynamics deserve further investigation to understand how they operate in an elite context.

This dissertation addresses the horse-rider relationship in a range of elite disciplines, including “mainstream” sports such as eventing and dressage, as well as other elite sports such as vaulting and endurance that are not included in the triad of equestrian sports that make up Olympic level equestrian competition (Bryant, 2008) but feature on the international stage at other elite equestrian competitions such as the World Equestrian Games. Excluded from this study was the relationship between horse and jockey in jumps- and flat-racing, as this was considered a distinct realm of equestrian sport that has already received considerable attention within the field of sport sociology (Hedenborg, 2008). The relationship between horse and rider must be examined with reference to individual sporting disciplines as this provides important contextual information that may shed light on the relational dynamics between horse and rider.

The distinction between elite and amateur competitors did not feature heavily in my initial plans for investigating the horse-rider relationship in a competitive sporting context.

My original thesis proposal was to study the dynamics of horse-rider relationships in sport and I commenced by interviewing elite and amateur riders. These early interviews were the sensitizing force that served to direct my attention to elite riders, as I began to recognise the complexities and tensions that defined the horse-rider relationship in an elite context. As I analysed these early interviews, the ways in which elite horse-rider relationships are influenced by both professional and personal dynamics became increasingly apparent, as will be addressed in this thesis.

History attests to the remarkable physical feats that horse and human have achieved together. Horses are athletic, companionable animals, qualities that make them well-suited to working with humans in a variety of roles and contexts (Kiley-Worthington, 2005). Numerous writers, researchers, and historians have provided accounts of the horse-human relationship, yet only a relatively small body of scientific literature in the field of sport psychology exists on the relationship between horse and rider, perhaps unsurprisingly, given that psychology has historically tended to ignore the study of human-animal relationships (Melson, 2002). Similarly, sport psychology, despite the natural interplay between sport and social processes (Hanin, 1992) has tended to focus on performance psychology, though a growing body of literature concerns dyadic and team relationships in sport.

1.4 Research Approach

Equestrian sports represent a particular challenge to those working and researching relationships in sport. Relationships are a challenging aspect of human life to describe and understand, however, interspecies relationships reflect a specific challenge, particularly in the case of horse-rider dyads where the communication between species is largely physical in nature (cf. Argent, 2012, Evans & Franklin, 2010). Psychology has traditionally privileged the mind over the body, in keeping with Descartan tradition (Dupre, 1990), making physically-oriented social relationships a particularly intriguing and often devalued area of study (cf. Smart, 2011). Furthermore, as Schlosser (2012) notes, intimate physical exchanges, which one may argue define much of the interaction between horse and rider, contribute to the development of social relationships in salient, but often difficult to articulate ways. That the psychological significance of human-animal relationships represents a relatively “new” area of scientific research reflects the traditional hesitancy of scientific researchers to examine this important category of social relationships (Herzog,

2011). Indeed, early scientific writing drew a firm line between human and animal capacities and positioned human-animal relationships outside the realm of meaningful social interaction (cf. Mead, 1934).

The aim of this dissertation was to construct an in-depth understanding of a specific phenomenon, and as such, qualitative research was judged a suitable means of approaching the topic (Morse, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005). Qualitative research facilitates exploration of social action and meaning via the collection of in-depth, rich data, contextualised within the social context from which it was drawn (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), while social constructionist grounded theory was identified as aligning with the philosophical and practical orientation of this dissertation. Grounded theory is a research method, methodology and an outcome of the research process; an inductive, iterative, and open-ended form of inquiry in which the researcher's analyses are represented as constructions of the studied world (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, a social constructionist grounded theory approach seeks to examine the ways in which research participants "use language and form and enact meanings" through language (Charmaz, 2014, p. 95). This allowed me to explore the data with close attention to the subjectivity that Charmaz (2014, p. 14) states "is inseparable from social existence," a fitting emphasis given the focus of the current study on social processes, relationships, and the role language plays in the development of these processes.

Social constructionist grounded theory requires a conscious examination of the preconceptions, values, and other factors that may limit, define, or shape what, as a researcher, I am able to identify in the data, drawing home the notion that research is constructed between researcher and participant, not simply emergent from participants' narratives (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13). Traditional versions of grounded theory have advised that scholars remain as distant as possible from existing literature before an analysis of the data is complete (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978). As Charmaz (2014) notes, preconceived ideas and pre-existing knowledge are unavoidable qualities researchers bring to their work, and theoretical "innocence" (p. 306) is unachievable for projects such as this in which the production of a literature review is a requirement of the early stages of candidature. I thus approached this work with an awareness of extant theories and empirical research, and my own preconceptions about the topic area, but choose to treat these as problematic, rather than accepted, in keeping with the abductive logic of grounded theory research.

A series of in-depth qualitative research interviews were undertaken, with twenty-nine elite riders, four former elite riders, and four sub-elite riders included in the final sample of interviewees after a decision was made to exclude data from amateur participants in order to focus more clearly on the dynamics of elite horse-rider relationships. Symbolic interactionism was selected as an appropriate theoretical perspective to accompany a social constructionist approach to grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2014). Building on the work of Sanders (2003), Brandt (2005), Sanders and Arluke (1994), Alger and Alger (1997) and Irvine (2004a), I argue for the extension of symbolic interactionism to include human-animal interaction in the broader rubric of meaningful social relationships.

Drawing on the theoretical emphasis of grounded theory research, the purpose of this study was to generate the beginnings of a substantive theory of horse-rider relationships as they occur in elite equestrian sport. A substantive theory provides an interpretation that has explanatory power with respect to a clearly demarcated problem, and emerges from the construction of analytic codes and categories (Charmaz, 2014, p. 344). In the context of the current study, this meant addressing the status and meaning of horse-rider relationships in elite sport via the construction of interrelated, abstract, analytic categories, leading to a theoretical framework "grounded" in data and interpretation. By engaging riders' perspectives and considering their 'second-hand' descriptions of their horses' perspectives, the relationship between horse and rider, as well as the dynamics of elite sport that shape these relationships, are illuminated, though the "double speak" Brandt (2005) writes of with respect to research in which the views of one party are necessarily accessed through those of another must be taken into consideration. Attending to the language riders use to describe their horses and their relationships with horses allowed the assumed, implied meanings of terms such "partnership" to become explicit, revealing the way language influences the phenomenon it attempts to describe (Charmaz, 2014).

The current study presented an opportunity to create a deeper understanding of how equestrian athletes navigate interspecies relationships at the highest echelons of sport. The narratives participants shared about their horses, themselves, and their experiences of interacting with horses represent in-depth accounts of highly personal aspects of human and animal lives. It is hoped that the knowledge generated through this research may contribute to a greater understanding of the horse-rider relationship in elite sport, and may help to develop the ways equestrian athletes, scientific researchers, and sport psychology practitioners alike think about the horse-rider relationship. It is also hoped that this

research may inform policy developments and decision-making activities within equestrian sport that have implications for horse-rider relationships and the safety and well-being of horse and rider.

The next two chapters of this dissertation will review literature relevant to the topic under investigation. Chapter Two addresses psychological conceptions of social relationships, with particular attention to sport and human-animal relationships. An overview of empirical and lay literature on horse-human relations is then provided in Chapter Three, as well as an analysis of the equestrian sporting contexts in which these relationships are situated. In Chapter Four, the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism is outlined, with reference to the main tenets of the perspective and the connection between symbolic interactionism and social constructionist grounded theory. In addition, the traditional approach symbolic interactionism has taken to human-animal relations will be outlined, followed by a discussion of relevant literature arguing for the inclusion of human-animal relationships as a meaningful form of social interaction within symbolic interactionist theory. Chapter Four will conclude with the purpose of the current study, as well as the aims and research questions that directed the data collection and analyses process.

Chapters Two, Three, and Four are designed to give the reader a sense of the pre-existing ideas, extant research findings, and sensitizing concepts that have served as a valuable point of comparison and analysis in constructing a theoretical framework of horse-rider relationships, in keeping with Thornberg's (2012) argument for informed, rather than naïve grounded theory. In Chapter Five, the qualitative methodological approach of the dissertation will be outlined, with respect to the key tenets of social constructionist grounded theory, and the data collection and analysis strategies that were utilised. Chapter Six outlines how the horse-rider relationship was understand and managed by participants, while Chapters Seven and Eight explore the meaning undergirding participants' descriptions of their horses and their relationships with them, with particular attention to the "partnership" between horse and rider. Chapter Nine addresses the influence of the horse-rider relationship on sporting performance for elite equestrian dyads. Finally, Chapter Ten provides an overview of the study findings, their implications and limitations, and concludes with some directions for future research.

Chapter 2 Dyadic Relationships

2.1 Introduction

Interpersonal relationships are central to all aspects of psychological experience (Carr, 2012b), with much of human behaviour occurring in a relational context (Berscheid, 1999). This chapter addresses social relationships, beginning with an appraisal of human relationships and how they have been understood and defined within psychological science. Human sporting relationships will then be outlined, drawing on social and sport psychology research to provide a framework for understanding team and dyadic social processes in sport. A commentary on human-animal interaction will then be offered, drawing on work from a diverse range of fields, including philosophy, social psychology, and animal psychology.

2.2 Social Relationships

Human experience depends to a great extent on social relationships (Berscheid, 1999), with social encounters implicated in around two-thirds of the average person's waking life (Reis & Rusbult, 2004). According to psychiatrist Harry Sullivan (1940), psychology as a discipline fundamentally concerns "interpersonal relations" (p. 10), while arguably no other factor has a larger role in human existence. Forming relationships lies at the heart of human biology. We are, as Guerrero, Andersen, and Afifi, (2007, p. 1) note, "born into relationships," fundamentally predisposed to living socially oriented lives, while social relationships are particularly relevant to understanding experiences of security, power, and unity (McAdams, 1988). Social relationships are instrumental, Reis (1985) argues, in that they enable the achievement of goals, play a key role in learning and knowledge-transmission, and enable us to express a unique sense of self and identity.

Relationship quality is a broad and subjective construct (Markey & Markey, 2007). Relationships may be characterised to varying degrees by emotional closeness, corresponding versus conflicting interests, and equality versus inequality (Kelley et al., 2003). For most individuals, social encounters range in intensity, depth, and meaning from "non-love" or casual interaction, to consummate love, characterised by intimacy, passion, and commitment (Sternberg, 2004). Social encounters may also take place in multiple settings and contexts that may act to regulate the intensity of these relationships. According to Kelley et al., (2003) the context in which a dyad typically interacts plays a pivotal role

in defining the relationship, while Snyder and Stukas (1999) note that the "rules" of the interaction, the personalities of those interacting, and the setting and purpose of the interaction all impact upon the process and outcomes of social interaction. Guerrero et al., (2007) delineate relationships according to whether they conform to traditional or non-traditional stereotypes of social interaction, are voluntary or involuntary (i.e. family relationships), romantic or platonic, as well as whether they are a source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, or some measure of both.

The closet social ties tend to be those of a familial or romantic nature, with mother-infant and romantic attachments constituting the two dyadic connections that involve the highest levels of physical proximity and intimacy (Myers, 2005). The degree of closeness or relational affiliation between two individuals is, as noted by Hess, Fannin, and Pollom (2007), a fundamental quality of personal relationships. Kirchler, Rodler, Holzl, and Meier (2001) describe the structure of close relationships according to two key factors: emotion and dominance relations. Emotional qualities of a relationship relate to the harmoniousness of the relationship, which may be understood as the sum of positive and negative emotions experienced within a relationship, while reciprocal power relations dictate how interaction between those within the relationship may progress (Kirchler et al., 2001).

In a key theoretical move for the psychology of personal relationships, Kelley et al., (1983) set forth a theory in which close relationships are defined according to the degree of interdependency between partners, with a variety of potential outcomes resulting from relational interdependence. Four dimensions determine the extent of interdependence in relationships: the frequency through which partners impact each other, the degree of impact per interaction, the diversity of activities in which the two impact each other, and the duration of interconnected, (inter)action (Kelley et al., 1983). "Close" relationships are therefore defined by Kelley et al., (1983) as those of considerable duration, in which individuals are strongly, frequently, and diversely connected to each other, while Wegner, Giuliano, and Hertel (1985, p. 253) suggest that interdependence is "the hallmark of intimacy." Lent and Lopez (2002) also define a "close" relationship as one in which both partners are interdependent, though not necessarily aware of their interdependence, nor equally interdependent. Interdependency may represent an opportunity to express either benevolence or exploitation within the relational context, with Rusbult and van Lange (2003) suggesting that an imbalance in dependence or fluctuations in dependence may evoke a sense of vulnerability within relationship partners.

Experiences of positive affect have been linked to close interpersonal relationships, but are generally seen as less fundamental to relationships than interdependence. While research suggests that close relationships have the potential to elicit high levels of affect (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Keltner & Haidt, 2001), they may not do so consistently, or at all, in some instances. Exchanging intimate information and producing regular intense positive feelings in another may characterise close relationships but is not considered a prerequisite of them by Kelley et al., (1983), or by Lent and Lopez (2002). Close relationships may also differ according to the needs an individual enters the relationship in hope of fulfilling, with affection and love, as well as power and control, central needs within the topography of personal relationships (Guerrero et al., 2007). With respect to power and equity in relationships, research has distinguished between two main types of social relationships: horizontal relationships defined by egalitarian, reciprocal exchanges between relative equals, and vertical relationships, defined by inequity within the relationship (Finkenauer, Engels, Branje & Meeus, 2004; Hinde, 1979).

The desire to understand those with whom one interacts, and feel understood in turn, is a powerful part of human relationships (Finkenauer & Righetti, 2011). A sense of validation and acceptance may be incurred through simply perceiving that those with whom one interacts are responsive (Finkenauer & Righetti, 2009; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004), while feeling understood may have positive benefits for not just the psyche of the individual but the quality of the relationship in which the understanding manifests itself (Reis et al., 2004). Umberson, Chen, House, Hopkins, and Slaten (1996) found that for both males and females, supportiveness in relationships was associated with low levels of psychological distress, while strategies for enhancing relational closeness identified by Hess et al., (2007) included being open and engaged with one's partner, as well as attending to their communicative messages. Individuals' perceptions and meta-perceptions of how their investments in close relationships are received play an important role in relationship satisfaction. As noted by Berger and Janoff-Bulman (2006), expenditures of time, effort, and/or resources in close relationships are neither intrinsically positive or negative. The degree to which we perceive our expenditures as recognised and appreciated tends to determine whether we consider the costs incurred in a relationship as "costs" or as an investment. Identical behaviours may be considered gains or losses depending on meta-perceptions about how one's partner feels about the efforts that have been made (Berger & Janoff-Bulman, 2006).

The positive health benefits of healthy, close interpersonal relationships are extensive, with research suggesting that such relationships may increase one's resistance to physiological and psychological stressors, with both animals and humans showing negative health responses when faced with isolation (Serpell, 1986). Enhanced mood has been associated with social contact (Berscheid & Reis, 1998), particularly that of an intimate nature (Diener, 1984). In a now landmark study, Berkman and Syme (1979) found that socially integrated members of the population had a two to three times greater chance of being alive after a nine-year period when compared to socially unconnected individuals, suggesting that social contact alone may be a powerful source of physical and psychological nurturance and well-being. Social relationships may also present certain challenges to psychological and physical well-being, with a range of research (cf. Orth-Gomer et al., 2000; Rohrbaugh, Shoham, & Coyne, 2006) suggesting that survival rates of chronic illnesses are linked to experiences of significant stress in intimate relationships, while a number of other psychological and physical outcomes may be negatively affected by lowered relationship quality (cf. Robles & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2003).

Interpersonal conflict is defined by Shantz (1987) as the result of disagreement, verbal or otherwise, resulting in behavioural opposition, with conflict an inevitable part of social interaction (Laursen, 1993; Kudonoo, Schroeder, & Boysen-Rotelli, 2012). This may be particularly so in relationships of a close interpersonal nature, given increased opportunities for interaction may equal increased opportunities for conflict, while interdependence naturally opens the door to conflict (Jehn, 1995). Yet while greater conflict is typically exhibited in interdependent relationships, research has found that negative outcomes associated with relationship conflict tend to decrease as interdependence increases, leading Laursen (1993) to conclude that conflict may be a catalyst for developing and strengthening social relationships.

Despite the unpleasantness of many conflictual interactions, conflict is not necessarily negative for interpersonal relationships, with Rusbult and van Lange (2003) suggesting that conflicting interests may provoke "interpersonally rich" (p. 352) opportunities to enact complex psychological processes, such as acts of self-expression, that may lead to psychological development of the self and of the relationship within which conflict occurs. Laursen and Hafen (2009) suggest that the consequences of interpersonal conflict depend on three factors: the frequency with which conflict occurs within the relationship, the way it is handled, and the strength of the relationship in which the conflict occurs. Furthermore, they note that conflict is more likely to be detrimental to the stability

of voluntary relationships, such as those between romantic partners, but less likely to affect the stability of obligatory relationships, such as those between family members.

Other research has offered mixed findings with respect to the impact of conflict on relationships (cf. Jehn, 1995), with intra-relationship factors and the potential cumulative effects of conflict across relationships further complicating matters, however, two types of conflict have broadly been defined with respect to their impact on relationship quality. Constructive conflict may help to develop a supportive relationship, while destructive conflict tends to breed antagonism, with both types of conflict having consequences for the individuals within the relationship, as well as the relationship itself (Laursen & Hafen, 2010). Conflict may also be delineated according to its content, with Wall and Nolan (1986) describing task-related and person-related conflict, and Jehn (1995) drawing a similar distinction with respect to group-based conflict.

Although conflict may be risky for relationships and for psychological and physical health, research suggests that moderate amounts of conflict may not necessarily have detrimental outcomes (Hollenbeck, Colquit, Ilgen, LePine, & Hedlund, 1998; Laursen & Hafen, 2010), though this may depend on the attachment styles of those concerned (Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996), as well as the type of conflict, and in group settings, the structure of the group (Jehn, 1995). Within an organisational context, how conflict is perceived and managed, argues Kudonoo et al., (2012), may be central to determining whether performance improves or diminishes, while Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) posit a curvilinear relationship between conflict and performance in organisational settings, with a variety of factors influencing how conflict impacts upon performance.

Communication is a vital interpersonal skill, the means by which we relate to one another, and the foundation upon which relationships are initiated, maintained, negotiated, and often dissolved (Hargie, 2006; Montgomery, 1988). As noted by Newcomb (1953), a significant portion of “social reality” is built into the language we use to communicate. Communication is the verbal or non-verbal process of sending and receiving a message (Athos & Gabarro, 1978), and occurs via a range of channels, including written and spoken words, and body language (LaVoi, 2007). Interpersonal communication is a dynamic, interdependent process, influenced by the value systems and personal characteristics of those communicating, and environmental factors (LaVoi, 2007). From a behavioural perspective, communication has been understood as the means by which the behaviour of one organism impacts the behaviour of another, usually adaptively (Wilson, 1975). Communication enables two or more individuals to maintain a simultaneous orientation

toward each other (Newcomb, 1953) and by its very nature, often results in symmetry between individuals; though this is not inevitable, particularly when that being communicated is of an intense nature.

The saying "actions speak louder than words" reflects the body's capacity to express emotions, feelings, and desires powerfully and in some instances, more honestly (Athos & Gabarro, 1978) than spoken language. As Athos and Gabarro (1978) state, almost every emotion can be communicated by body language and much of what we communicate to others is, deliberately or inadvertently, conveyed via the body. According to Losoya and Eisenberg (2001), understanding in social interaction requires the capacity to perceive, recognise, and appreciate others' emotional, behavioural, attitudinal, and intentional states, and attending to body language may be pivotal. As noted by Karadag, Caliskan, and Yesil (2008), physical responses tend to be spontaneous, and as Knapp and Hall (2002) suggest, the importance of nonverbal communication is such that when verbal and non-verbal messages conflict, non-verbal messages are typically accorded more importance, with some arguing that up to 93% of meaning is transmitted non-verbally (Ferguson, 2008). Moreover, unlike verbal communication, non-verbal communication is never absent from social interaction (Athos & Gabarro, 1978).

A major facet of close relationships is typically, though not always, commitment. Commitment is described by Weigel (2008, p. 17) as "the hallmark of enduring relationships" and a key explanation for relationship continuance or discontinuance (Adams & Jones, 1999). Commitment reflects an individual's intention to persist in a relationship (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998) and is influenced by relationship satisfaction, quality of alternatives, and the size of investment (Rusbult, 1983). The formation of commitment is a dualistic process, "not something we conjure up in our own mind by ourselves" but, "co-constructed via interactions with our partners and with others" (Knapp & Taylor, 1994, p. 172-173). Commitment is non-static and subject to continual modification via explicit and implicit communication between partners (Knapp & Taylor, 1994), whilst also comprised of and communicated through a range of intentional and unintentional behaviours (Marston, Hecht, Manke, McDaniel, & Reeder, 1998).

Another facet of a close relationship is attachment, with mutual understanding, giving and receiving support, valuing and enjoying being with the "other," all generally considered a part of most "loving attachments" (Myers, 2005, p. 458). Attachment bonds are typically enduring and constant, independent of specific situations (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) and are often used to refer to the bond between an infant and its

primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1958), though Bowlby (2005) hypothesized that attachment was integral throughout the human lifespan, with early attachment experiences creating lifelong working models. A range of research has addressed attachment bonds in parent-child, and adult human relationships, while a growing body of research has addressed the attachment relationship between humans and animals (cf. Beck & Madresh, 2008; Julius, Beetz, Kotrschal, Turner, & Uvnas-Moberg, 2013; Kurdek, 2009; Kwong & Bartholomew, 2011; Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2011).

Dyads have often been addressed in terms of their complementarity, conceptualized as both the product of behavioural interaction, and a pattern of interpersonal behaviour resulting from one's personality traits (Markey & Markey, 2007). As noted by Markey, Funder, and Ozer (2003), interpersonal theory makes the assumption that an individual's behaviour typically evokes complementary behavioural responses from those with whom he or she is interacting. Similarly, the complementarity hypothesis argues that individuals tend to be attracted to individuals with needs that both differ from and complement their own. Despite its intuitive appeal, this theory has received mostly weak and inconsistent empirical support (Colman, 2003). Finally, relational equity influences a broad range of relationships, particularly those of an intimate nature (Hatfield, Traupmann, Sprecher, Utne, & Hay, 1985), with the extent to which dyads feel their relationship is "equitable" impacting relationship satisfaction and contentment (Fletcher, Fincham, Cramer, & Heron, 1987; Hatfield et al., 1985). Research suggests that dyads work best together when they perceive themselves to be of equal status, particularly in competitive situations (Tjosvold, 1981), with perceived similarity in ability levels increasing the chances of a dyad forming an effective two-party team (Wickwire, Bloom, & Loughead, 2004).

2.3 Sporting Dyads

Relationships in sport represent a unique relational microcosm and have been linked to sporting enjoyment and performance, and investigated using a number of social psychology theories (Carr, 2012b). Sporting disciplines inevitably involve interpersonal relationships, social processes, and organised social activity (Hanin, 1992), while a range of researchers have called for the recognition of interpersonal relationships in sport (cf. Carr, 2009; Jowett & Wylleman, 2006; Poczwardowski, Barott, & Jowett, 2006; Smith, 2003; Wylleman, 2000). Interpersonal relationships in sport may also carry important implications for psychological functioning beyond the sporting context (Carr, 2012a),

particularly for those athletes whose lives are deeply embedded in their sporting practice. From a sporting perspective, a dyad is comprised of two communicating individuals and constitutes the smallest possible sporting team (White, 1982). There are currently fourteen dyadic team events at the Olympic Games, yet relatively little research has been conducted on dyadic sports (Wickwire et al., 2004), and only a small number of sport-specific frameworks of dyadic relationships exist (Jowett & Meek, 2000). Despite the relevance of relational processes in a sporting context, sport psychology research has largely focused on variables considered to directly impact or enhance performance, and generally at the level of the individual.

Interpersonal processes in sport psychology have often been conceptualized and studied in terms of cohesion (Scilligo, Bergerone, Cei, Ceridono, & Formica, 1986). Cohesion is defined by Carron, Brawley, and Widmeyer (1998) as a dynamic process manifested in the tendency for a group to stay together and unite in the pursuit of their instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of members' affective needs. The concept of cohesion is typically considered in context to sporting teams rather than dyads; however, the theoretical tenets of cohesion tend to be broadly applicable across different forms of sporting relationships. Cohesion may also be an antidote to excessive conflict and may be critical in preventing relationship/group breakdown; it is not, static, however, but a dynamic, fluid construct that it changes over time in its intensity and form (Carron, Shapcott, & Burke, 2007).

Research suggests that a close working relationship between coach and athlete requires a high degree of interaction, and mutual reliance and understanding (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009b). On an affective, cognitive, and behavioural level, the coach-athlete relationship is impacted by the feelings (i.e. closeness, socio-emotional connection), thoughts (i.e. commitment, perceptions and interpretations) and behaviours (i.e. correspondence and reciprocity) of both coach and athlete (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Several rudimentary models of the coach-athlete relationship exist, derived from Kiesler's (1983; 1997) interpersonal theory, Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) interdependence theory, and Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, and Surrey's (1991) relational-cultural theory, and with potential applicability for other sporting relationships.

Research has addressed direct and meta-perspectives between coach and athlete (Jowett, 2006), with Wylleman (2000) proposing a behavioural model of the coach-athlete relationship in which interpersonal behaviours are categorized along three dimensions: acceptance-rejection (positive/negative attitude toward the relationship), dominance-

submission (strong/weak position in the relationship), social-emotional (social/personal role in relationship). Similarly, Nitsch and Hackfort (1984) differentiate between power, co-operation, and bonds, suggesting that sporting relationships are built on mutual agreements and acceptance of goals (Philippe & Seiler, 2006). Qualitative research by Seiler, Kevesligeti, and Valley (1999) on fifteen female athletes and their coaches identified mutual agreement and acceptance of goals and conditions as important components of the coach-athlete relationship.

The 3 + 1Cs model, developed by Jowett and colleagues on the principles of social exchange theory, outlines the role of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation in coach-athlete relationships (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Social exchange theory argues that negotiated exchanges take place over the course of social interaction and these exchanges have implications for the perceptions one has of any given social relationship (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Affective qualities (i.e. trust, liking, respect) have been found to impact relationship stability and dyad satisfaction (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007; Jowett, 2003), while establishing common ground via communicative processes resulted in co-orientation (Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Despite its popularity and conceptual sense, however, Jowett's (2003) model has not always been found to accurately reflect the dimensions of the coach-athlete relationship. In qualitative research on elite swimmers by Philippe and Seiler (2006) approximately 10% of participants' responses did not fit Jowett's (2003) framework, with the researchers suggesting an integration of the power, co-operation, and bonds dimension of Nitsch and Hackfort's (1984) model may improve the applicability of Jowett's model to the coach-athlete relationship.

A successful coach-athlete relationship may be defined according to relationship satisfaction and performance success (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007), yet Jowett (2003) notes that a range of research has failed to find conclusive evidence of a causal relationship between the quality of the coach-athlete relationship and performance outcomes. Positive coach-athlete relationships may result in benefits that extend beyond performance outcomes, however, such as personal growth, while relationships that are ineffective personally but successful professionally may be considered just as unfavourable as relationships that are both ineffective and unsuccessful, with the costs of relationship dissatisfaction potentially outweighing the rewards of success (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Interpersonal dyadic conflict may result in imbalance, incongruence, and incompatibility within dyadic relationships (Hinde, 1979), while negatively impacting the

stress, motivation, confidence, and self-esteem levels of both coach and athlete, as well as the performance accomplishments of the athlete (Jowett, 2003). Autonomy and connectedness have been identified as key issues in coach-athlete relationship breakdown, leading Jowett (2003) to conclude that some measure of both constructs is required to feel united and in control of the environment, while mutual dependence was identified as relevant to coach-athlete relationships, despite the power differential between partners.

As well as considering the coach-athlete relationship, sport psychology has examined relationships between interspecies sporting dyads, such as ice-skating pairs and tennis doubles, as well as the social relationships within sporting teams. A qualitative investigation of the interaction processes within an elite same-sex volleyball team conducted by Wickwire et al., (2004) revealed that because communication occurred between only two individuals, it tended to be continuous, intense, and efficient. In addition, creating a sense of balance and give and take within the relationship were important to relationship quality, as was sharing responsibility for actions and outcomes (Wickwire et al., 2004). Empathic accuracy, or the ability to perceive the psychological state of another, has also been identified as relevant to sporting dyads (Ickes, Stinson, Bissonnette, & Garcia, 1990), with shared cognitive focus a key element of empathic accuracy (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a).

2.4 Human-Animal Relationships

The divide between humans and animals has long been questioned in psychological research and philosophical writing. Psychology has been informed and influenced by Cartesian dualism (Dupre, 1990), in which animals are seen as possessing bodies but lacking minds, more akin to machines or plants than living beings (Descartes, 1901). Both human and animal bodies have been viewed in mechanical terms, but unlike animals, human bodies were restored somewhat by the added virtues of an immortal soul and the ability to speak (Descartes, 1901). Aristotle held that animals were intelligent, but could not reason, sufficient grounds for excluding them from moral consideration (Beauchamp, 2011), thus opening up a variety of ways in which humans could treat animals without the condemnation that would result if another human being were treated as such.

From these early anthropocentric, religiously, and philosophically motivated arguments, laws developed in an attempt to cement the distinction between humans and animals and to support the contention that animals have no rights (Maehle, 1994). Contrary

to this, Darwin (1871) took phylogenetic continuity as evidence of evolutionary consistency between humans and animals, on both a physiological and psychological level. Darwin (1872) believed the full spectrum of subjective human experience was available to animals and in early writing, comprehensively denied the existence of any "fundamental difference between man and the higher animals in their mental faculties" (Darwin, 1871, p. 448). Whilst varying interpretations have been offered of these early scientific ideas about animal minds, much of scientific history appears to have involved ignoring animal minds altogether. Adding to the uncertainty around the mental abilities of animals is the reality that, as Griffin (1976) has pointed out, mental experiences are difficult to define and complex to study scientifically.

Recent research (cf. Charles & Davis, 2008; Haraway, 2003) has argued that the boundary between humans and animals is permeable, particularly when animals and humans interact within a shared domestic space, while Serpell (1996b) suggests that a certain measure of discomfort accompanies an acknowledgement of the fine line between human and animal species. Interpreting the subjective mental experiences of animals may be "a fundamental intellectual challenge" (Griffin, 1984, p. 1), yet as Griffin (1984) and Rollin (1990) point out, animal awareness has not been neglected simply because it is difficult to study; it has also been neglected because it has the potential to open Pandora's Box with respect to philosophical and psychological questions about mankind. A "common-sense" view of animal minds rests upon the notion that animals can both think and feel; an idea that has been heavily scrutinized, while the ambivalence with which the sciences have approached animal consciousness has gone largely unquestioned (Rollin, 1990). This may be because the social order of human life depends in part upon the segregation and in some cases, exploitation of certain species, with the inferiority and otherness of animals reinforced by examining how advocates for the equality of women, another "inferior caste," often compare their plight to that of animals (Garrett, 2011).

A reductionist, utilitarian view of animals permits humans to cause pain and suffering to animals for, apparently, the greater human good, and releases science from concern about its contribution to this subjugation of animals. Science is responsible for the use of animals in painful scientific research projects, as well as partly responsible for the development of sophisticated animal production systems used in agricultural settings (Rollin, 1990). Yet with concern for animal welfare increasing within and outside the scientific community, questions of animal consciousness and the moral status of animals are beginning to re-enter what Rollin (1990, p. 391) terms "scientific legitimacy," though

he suggests scientific appraisals of animal mentation are still "transitional and uncertain" (p. 390). In rather more passionate terms, Bekoff (2008, p. 3) states, "the desperation of science to rob animals of their sentience, despite what science has discovered, is astounding as well as disheartening and nothing more than self-serving anthropocentrism."

With respect to the human-animal divide, Bradie (2011) presents several forms of evidence for continuity between humans and animals. First, he draws upon Darwinian evidence of an evolutionary history shared between species; second, he notes the continuity in human-animal sensory capacities (i.e. sight, touch, smell, hearing, and taste), and third, he refers to neuro-scientific evidence indicating shared brain structures across species that are relevant to emotional and mental processing. Finally, Bradie (2011) draws upon findings from cognitive ethology that suggest moral capacities may be present in at least some animals, with "empathy, cooperation…and fairness" (p. 555) evident in certain animals. The notion that thinking is impossible without the capacity for spoken language, and therefore that animals are incapable of thinking, has been challenged by Fudge (2008) who argues that this places not just animals, but also humans with certain hearing deficits outside the human community. As debate around animal mindedness, and the implications of animal minds for human-animal relationships continues, Braz (2012) notes that our responses to animals become increasingly complicated as we recognise how alike and unlike them we are.

Human beings appear fundamentally interested in the perceptions and feelings of others, and animals are no exception. As Sanders and Arluke (1993) suggest, humans that regularly interact with animals make judgements about their intentions and about the animal's internal state, while Cerulo (2009) cites survey research that supports the notion that intimate pet-owner bonds are commonly accompanied by claims for a pet's understanding of human language, as well as human understanding of pet language. This suggests that mutual understanding, or at very least the perception of it, may accompany a sense of closeness in pet-human relationships, while a number of researchers (cf. Alger & Alger, 1997; Sanders & Arluke, 1993; Flynn, 2000; Sanders, 1993) have investigated how meanings may be created and shared in interspecies relationships. Arguments have also been made (cf. Brandt, 2005; Sanders, 1999) for the legitimacy and power of non-verbal communication, through which a genuine intersubjective "knowing" of the animal other may occur.

To investigate attributions of mindedness in dog-human relationships, Sanders (1993) conducted a research study in which he examined auto-ethnographic data from his

relationships with his own dogs, observational data collected at a veterinary clinic, and interview data from a series of twenty-four interviews with dog owners. He observed that dogs were not treated as objects or literally as "people," but rather as minded individuals, capable of expressing empathy, deep emotion, creativity, and interacting with humans in a responsive, reciprocal and authentic fashion. Alger and Alger (1997) sought to extend these findings in their study of feline-human interaction in which in-depth interview, auto-ethnographic data from observing their own cats, and lay literature on cat behaviour were examined. Their research provided evidence to support the notion that cats may take the role of another, choose courses of action, and have a mind-map of the future, suggesting a mindedness may exist across species. Furthermore, the data sources they examined augmented an understanding of cats as individuals with a personal history, while empathic exchanges were apparent between cats and humans, corroborating Sander's (1993) research with dogs.

A study conducted by Flynn (2000) on the role of companion animals in the lives of battered women revealed that the relationships between participants and their animals were neither one-directional or devoid of symbolic understanding. Rather Flynn (2000) suggests that animals were capable of sharing their owner's definitions of social situations, particularly those of a dangerous and traumatic nature, and therefore demonstrated an ability to take the role of their owner and interact on a symbolic level. Emotional and bodily communication played a critical role in these exchanges; participants cited their pets' experiences of emotion as well as their ability to sense and respond to their owner's emotional state, suggesting an emotional attunement in the absence of spoken language. These findings provide support for research by Sanders (1999) indicating that dogs possess the ability to follow the gaze of another using head orientation and eye gaze as cues, while research suggests that horses may possess this same ability to some extent, though perhaps less so than dogs (McKinley & Sambrook, 2000). Horses may also be able to follow pointing gestures, though research has not been able to clarify the level of comprehension associated with such behavioural responses (Maros, Gacsi, & Miklosi, 2008). Horses may also be able to discriminate between individuals according to physical signs of attentiveness, with a preference demonstrated for attentive individuals, suggesting horses may possess the ability to penetrate another's perspective (Proops & McComb, 2010).

The charge of being anthropomorphic toward animals rests on the assumption that there are certain unique human properties, such as language, self-consciousness, feelings, and even intentionality that define what it is to be human and separate the species in

categorical, rather than continuous ways (Kennedy, 1992). Historically anthropomorphism has referred to an invalid understanding of animal thought and consciousness (Fisher, 1990) that involves attributing mental states to animals without sufficient evidence for doing so (Griffin, 1976; Tyler, 2003), with attributions of emotion and intentionality particularly grievous and inaccurate (Beauchamp, 2011). What constitutes an anthropomorphic attribution has been broadly contested, with some arguing that there is as little continuity within species as there is across species. Wittgenstein (1958, p. 223), for instance, notes how a human being can be an enigma to another human being in just the same way an animal may be, bringing into question the boundaries around all social attributions. In their research on equine personalities, Morris, Duffy, and Gale (n.d.) argue that commonalities in individual differences make the charge of anthropomorphism irrelevant, while Andrews (2011) notes that empirical research has indicated some shared psychological properties between humans and animals.

Decisions about anthropomorphism must be based on the results of empirical evidence, but instead are often based on what Andrews (2011) terms "pre-empirical consideration[s]" (p. 470). Further to this, Tyler (2003) suggests that anthropomorphism is risky, because it encourages us to inflate or misrepresent those qualities that are considered uniquely human, and inadvertently leads us to bypass what is "proper and peculiar" (p. 270) in animals in the process of trying to elucidate which human qualities are shared with animals. This latter crime, Tyler (2003) points out, is best evidenced in the story of Clever Hans; by focusing their attention on what appeared to be Hans' advanced (human) mental abilities, trained scientists remained near oblivious to the horse's ability to sense and respond to human bodily cues.

Anthropomorphism may be short-sighted, even demeaning of animals, yet as Irvine (2004a) has pointed out, human beings cannot escape their human perspective. All understanding, as Shapiro (1997, p. 294) argues, is shaped by the perspective of the social observer, anthropomorphism "is not an occasional attributional error to which we are particularly prone when we cross species' lines." Furthermore anthropomorphism is only a fallacy if the qualities that are commonly attributed to animals do not belong to them, and while some qualities do appear to separate the species, many qualities have not been definitively proven or disproven with respect to their relevance for animals. Assuming qualities observed in human beings do not also occur in animals without firm evidence constitutes what Griffin (1976) terms "conceited" belief. Further to this, Dillard-Wright (2012) suggests that while human egos may be comfortable with the notion that intelligent

life is restricted to our species, this view overlooks many astounding abilities amongst other species. He writes "to acknowledge continuities between human thought and the thinking of other animals does not amount to positing sameness – rather, such a viewpoint contextualises mindedness within the somatic and environmental niches that support it" (p. 207).

Fascinating as the question of animal consciousness is, the intent of this thesis was not to form an argument with respect to the mental capabilities of animals, though a discussion of this issue is relevant to the work. A dissertation of this kind requires the boundaries of various disciplines, including animal behaviour, philosophy, ethics, sociology, physiology, and sport and social psychology, to be crossed; however, it is beyond the scope of this work to closely examine scientific evidence of animal consciousness. I have not attempted to analyse my participants' narratives for evidence of conscious thinking in animals, though their views on the minds of animals are relevant to the findings of this research. Thus while key issues surrounding animal minds and animal ethics have been addressed, the focus of the work was to examine how constructions of animal minds influence the relationship between horse and rider in equestrian sport.

Despite the historic reticence of the scientific community to attend to this category of social relationships (Melson, 2002), with the phrase "human-animal bond" only developed in 1977 (Anderson, 2004, p. 7), animals appear to play a critical role in the social lives of humans and vice versa. A growing body of research supports the positive impact human-animal interaction may have on the health of pet owners (cf. Dembiki & Anderson, 1996; Friedmann, Katcher, Lynch, & Thomas, 1980; Simpson & Rholes, 1998), with a broad range of psychosocial and health-related benefits associated with simply being in the presence of an animal, including improved pain management, mood, increased levels of oxytocin, and improvements in empathic abilities (cf. Julius et al., 2013). The Australian Companion Animal Council (n.d.) estimates that around two-thirds of Australian households include a pet, with roughly similar numbers present in American and European households, though pets are comparatively less common in Eastern households, and it is difficult to identify the number of pets present in a number of regions, such as South America (Dray, 2014). The latest census data from the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) (2012) indicates that more than half of pet owners consider their pet to be a family member, in keeping with the research findings of Belk (1996), with Australian-based research indicating a similar pattern (Australian Companion Animal Council, n.d.). This suggests that human-animal relationships may play a pivotal role in the

social stratospheres of human life and may provide a significant source of social support (Dembicki & Anderson, 1996).

These findings represent a significant development in the status quo of animals in relation to humans, with Serpell and Paul (1994) reminding us that up until the early 19th century, bear-baiting, bull-baiting, dog-fighting, and other varied abuses were common and reported emotional attachments to animals were rare (Harwood, 1928; Ryder, 1989; Thomas, 1983; Maehle, 1994). This is not to imply that forming attachments to animals is necessarily a new phenomenon; rather it may be that the scientific practice of documenting these attachments is relatively new. Increasing recognition of interspecies relationships represents an important step in dismantling the mind-body, human-animal dualisms of psychological science (Melson, 2002) and "the doctrine of human supremacy" that Irvine (2004b) contends "has meant that close relationships with animals have often been ideologically impossible" (p. 5). Attachment theory has been applied to human-animal relationships (Budge, Spicer, Jones, & St. George, 1998; Lookabaugh-Triebenbacher, 1999), with grief reactions to the death of a pet suggesting some commonality in inter- and intra-species attachments (Gosse & Barnes, 1994). Unique differences may exist between human-human and human-animal attachments (Crawford, Worsham, & Swinehart, 2006) though some have suggested there may be more similarities than differences between the two types of attachment (Lookabaugh-Triebenbacher, 1999; Palmer and Custance, 2008).

Animal communication has long fascinated human beings (Bekoff & Jamieson, 1990), with a range of research concerning the nuances of intra- and inter-species communication involving animals. Estep and Hetts (1992) argue that the more similar two species are in their systems of communication, the higher the likelihood that they will influence each other, and form a symbiotic, socially attached relationship. Attachments between both animate organisms with widely different communication systems, and animate organisms and inanimate objects provides a challenge to this notion, however, with the imprinting literature documenting the occurrence of such attachments within both the human and animal kingdom (Estep & Hetts, 1992). Yet the view that nothing separates humans more from animals than language (Griffin, 1976) is still widely held and is often considered fundamental to the scientific investigation of animal consciousness.

It is relatively easy to determine if human communication is intentional; communication in the animal kingdom is another issue altogether, and is a matter of great debate because of its propensity to influence both our perspective and treatment of animals (Rogers & Kaplan, 1998). Although meaningful social relationships may be created in a

variety of ways, the most salient links are often formed between organisms of similar communicative systems, while prolonged sensory contact may breed a sense of familiarity that encourages conspecific responses and attachments to form (Estep & Hetts, 1992). From a different perspective, Voith (1985) suggests that human attachment to pet animals is a by-product of the fact that the behaviour of pets often mimics that of children and adult humans, elicits care-giving and affiliative behaviour, and in so doing, taps the human intraspecific attachment system. In conclusion, research suggests that pet-human relationships are usually experienced by humans as emotionally close relationships (cf. Anderson, 2004; Australian Companion Animal Council, 2009; Beck & Madresh, 2008; Cowles, 1985; Fine, 2006; Serpell, 1986) legitimizing pets as attachment figures, and bringing new questions about the sentient value of domesticated animals. As Serpell and Paul (1994) reflect, interesting possibilities are attached to bestowing upon animals quasi-human status, while Kuhl's (2011) research on human-sled dog relationships found that a sense of knowing, respect, engagement in two-way communication, trust, and partnership were critical in defining the interaction that took place between dog and human. These findings suggest that human-animal relationships may be complex, rich, and meaningful social encounters, deserving of further scientific exploration, especially as the scientific community is drawn to consider not just whether human-animal relationships are good for people, but whether human-animal relationships are good for animals.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has addressed the defining characteristics of human social relationships, offered an appraisal of dyadic relationships in sport, and outlined the important and historically overlooked social relationships that occur between humans and animals. Animal mindedness and other attributes that may play a role in determining the structure of interspecies relationships have been addressed, while an appraisal has been offered of scientific analyses of human-animal relationships. In the following chapter a specific category of interspecies sporting relationship will be addressed - the relationship between horses and humans.

Chapter 3 Horse-Human Relationships

3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the relationship between humans and horses, with particular attention to the horse-rider relationship in equestrian sport. A brief introduction to *Equus ferus caballus* as a species will be provided, followed by an appraisal of human-horse interaction over time and across contexts. The dynamics of a range of elite equestrian sporting disciplines will then be outlined, followed by an analysis of horse-rider interaction in modern sport and the language used to describe equestrian dyads. The chapter will conclude with a critical appraisal of equestrian sports from both a moral and ethical standpoint, with particular attention to horse welfare.

3.2 Horses as a Species

"In order to cultivate a working relationship with the horse," Whitaker and Whitelaw (2007, p. 92), state, "it is necessary for the handler to appreciate the innate nature of the animal." Horses are complex, almost paradoxical creatures; domesticated, yet intensely powerful, capable of performing tremendous physical feats, yet remarkably vulnerable in some aspects of their physical conformation (Anthony, 2007). They are highly sociable and capable of aggression (Anthony, 2007) and exist within hierarchically-organised herds that depend upon the ability of herd members to perceive each other's intentions, desires, and needs (Kiley-Worthington, 2005). Peaceful domestic relationships between horses and humans depend upon a horse's ability to interpret social signals (Budiansky, 1997), while horses are emotionally reactive creatures that typically respond to physical or other forms of pressure with avoidant behaviour and appear capable of experiencing compassion and empathy (Kiley-Worthington, 2005). Horses rely upon three main forms of mental processing: instinct, association, and memory, and are predisposed to seek shelter from fear-inducing stimuli (Whitaker & Whitelaw, 2007), with fight-or-flight a dominant instinctual quality of horses (Coffin, 1978).

Questions about equine intelligence have rendered no straightforward answers, though the horse's ability to learn and its outstanding memory have been documented (cf. McLean & McLean, 2008; Sankey, Richard-Yris, Leroy, Henry, & Hausberger, 2010). Most accounts suggest the horse has a relatively limited intellect and lacks the ability to reason (Borton, 1990; McLean, 2003), with much of the horse's brain devoted to

maintaining physical coordination (Budiansky, 1997). Interestingly, however, the portion of the brain that controls 'feelings' in the horse has been found to be just as large as it is in humans, suggesting that horses may be capable of feeling a depth and range of emotions, including fear and anxiety, but lack the capacity to analyse these emotions (Marsden, 2005). Brandt (2004) suggests that horses think, have emotions, make decisions, and like human beings, develop ways of communicating the subjectivity of their lives, while McShane and Tarr (2007) argue that the horse managed to survive into the modern era because "it found an ecological niche as a partner for humans" (p. 1). Developed sensory and mental capacities appear advantageous for a preyed-upon-species, leading some to question why horses, a virtual success story of natural evolution (Budiansky, 1997), would not possess sophisticated mental abilities such as the capacity to communicate symbolically (Alger & Alger, 1997).

3.3 Horse-Human Relations

Horses and humans have for centuries been linked via a number of realms of life, including agriculture, sport, and war (McLean, 2003), food, transportation, and companionship (Hansen, 2009). Horses have been held as symbolic of power, strength, domestication, obedience, good luck, honesty, and even common sense, while along with references to the physical and emotional benefits of horse-riding, the relationship between horses and humans dates as far back as the 17th century (Lawrence, 1985). Domesticating horses arguably resulted from the need for cheap meat; while riding horses, Anthony (2007) suggests, most likely originated from the need to maintain the horse's domestication. The act of riding horses has always been a goal-oriented activity, closely linked to the development of human civilization (Borton, 1990), with horses an industrial source of power and productivity (Whitaker & Whitelaw, 2007). The horse's role in human society has also evolved dramatically over time. World War I marked a rapid decline in the use of horses for agriculture and transport, a change cemented by the Industrial Revolution, while by the end of World War II the horse's role in society revolved around sporting and recreational endeavours (Crossman & Walsh, 2011).

Horses have been revered in human society and culture unlike any other animal, with their powerful, graceful physicality fascinating human imaginations (Chamberlin, 2007), a fact reflected in the many sculptures and other artworks that depict the horse's beauty (Borton, 1990). The horse's symbolic connection with wealth, pleasure, and

prosperity has also been well documented, along with its association with deities, while an estimated 40,000 books have been written about horses (Budiansky, 1997), many of which concern the interaction between horses and humans. In "The Art of Horsemanship," the oldest manual on horse care and riding, Xenophon writes passionately of the importance of building a relationship of mutual trust between horse and rider (Whitaker & Whitelaw, 2007) as well as attempting to understand horse behaviour (Pretty & Bridgeman, 2005). The history of horse-human relations has also been marked by notable horse-human bonds, such as that between Alexander the Great and Bucephalus (Whitaker & Whitelaw, 2007). Although heavily romanticised, historians have documented the attentiveness Alexander showed to the horse's bodily cues, enabling him to establish a rapport with Buchephalus where others had failed (Felando, 2014) leading some to label him the first horse whisperer in history (Chamberlin, 2007).

Other notable partnerships in the history of horse-human relations include that of Napoleon and Marengo, and the Duke of Wellington and Cophenhagen (Shaw, 2013). The centaur of Greek mythology has also been used to represent deep union between horse and rider, with Game (2001) arguing that the state of being part horse, part human is both an inevitable embodiment of the rhythm of connecting with another species and an archetype of the spiritual connection between horse and rider. Humans, Game (2001, p. 1) writes, have "a capacity for horseness." She argues that we see something of the animal in ourselves when we interact closely with them, labelling horse-human interaction "extrasensory and transcendent" (Argent, 2012, p. 112). In the 21st century, horses have been integrated into human society in a multiplicity of ways, with horse racing and competitive non-racing equestrian activities common domains of modern horses, along with private horse ownership for recreational purposes (Crossman & Walsh, 2011).

3.3.1 The Psychology of the Horse-Human Relationship

A growing body of scientific research suggests that interacting with horses may result in important psychosocial, even physical benefits, while some of these benefits may be reciprocal (Crawley & Chamove, 1997), though much more research has been conducted on the effect horses have on humans than the other way round. Egan (2012) investigated the educative and psychotherapeutic effect of the horse-human bond using a sample of eight practitioners of natural horsemanship, identifying a range of skills that were enhanced through contact with horses. In Garcia's (2010) research on the human-

horse bond, she argues that contact with horses may provide important information that encourages one to reframe the self, identifying four processes including emotional mirroring, whereby body language exchanges between horse and human provide the human with feedback on their own internal state, deep bodily communication, spirituality within the horse-rider bond, and an increased sense of connection to the earth (Garcia, 2010).

A number of authors have documented the human capacity to form unconditional love-based bonds with animals (McCormick & McCormick, 1997) in which emotions and emotional transference plays a pivotal role. The concept of transference has received considerable attention in context to Freud's psychoanalytic therapy (Ryckman, 2004) and is frequently considered in context to the therapeutic relationship (Trull, 2005). With respect to their work with mentally disturbed patients, McCormick and McCormick (1997) document how horses appear to help human beings deepen their awareness of the effects of their behaviour on other people, and on horses themselves, through their ability to honestly reflect human behaviour and emotions. McCormick and McCormick (1997) describe a good relationship with a horse as both liberating and exhilarating, with the connection between horse and human leading to the arousal of important physical, mental, and spiritual senses.

In fascinating research on the effect nervous humans have on horses, Keeling, Jonare, and Lanneborn (2009) measured the heart rates of horses and those riding and/or leading them in an indoor arena. In the experimental condition, participants were told to expect an umbrella to be opened as they rode or led the horse past an assistant. Despite the fact that an umbrella was not opened, participants' heart rates and the heart rates of their horses increased significantly, suggesting that horses may be susceptible to sensing unconscious signals from humans, particularly where these signals are of an anxiety-provoking nature. Research has suggested that humans can have a powerful effect on the emotional reactivity of horses (cf. Hada, Onaka, Kusunose, & Yagi, 2001; Heird, Whitaker, Bell, Ramsey, & Lockey, 1986; McCann, Heird, Bell, & Lutherer, 1988), with research by Fureix et al., (2009) demonstrating decreases in emotional reactivity in horses following the application of natural horsemanship handling methods, in which desensitization methods are used and visual and gestural cues are stressed, as opposed to traditional horsemanship handling methods, where vocal instructions and standard "breaking-in" procedures were emphasized.

Research findings on the reactivity of horses to human mental states have been somewhat mixed, with Tompkins and Pretty (2000) failing to find a relationship between riders' self-reported mental states and their perceptions of their horses' mental states, while research by Hama, Yogo, and Matsuyama (1996) suggests that horses may be reactive to their rider's mental state. Using a sample of 18 male students, Hama et al., (1996) found the heart rates of both humans and horses tended to increase immediately after the participant commenced stroking the horse, but gradually decreased thereafter. Horses' heart rates were slightly lower when stroked by subjects familiar with horses than when stroked by those from the positive attitude group, while horse heart rates initially increased when stroked by participants from the negative attitude group, but then gradually decreased. Such findings suggest horses may be able to discriminate between individuals according to their attitude via emotional contagion and also supports the notion that companion animals may provide humans with significant psychological and emotional benefits (Hama et al., 1996).

In similar research, Chamove, Crawley-Hartrick, and Stafford (2002) found that the horse in their study exhibited more positive behaviours when led by veterinary students who held positive attitudes toward horses, spent a considerable amount of time around horses, and were confident interacting with them than when led by students who did not possess these traits. Other studies suggest that transference may have direct physiological effects on both horse and rider. In research conducted by Crawley and Chamove (1997) agitated and abnormal equine behaviour was reduced by 70% by merely being in proximity to a human, and by 90% when physical contact occurred between horse and human, while Lynch, Fregin, Mackie, and Monroe (1974) observed that simply being stroked by a human resulted in a slowing of horses' heart rates.

Horse-human interaction may carry specific psychosocial benefits for those with mental or physical health problems, as a growing body of psychological research on horses in therapy has begun to explore. The rationale behind equine therapy lies in the capacity of horses to elicit a range of emotions and behaviours in humans, subsequently creating opportunities for individuals to deepen their personal awareness and inner growth (Zugich, Klontz, & Leinart, 2002) and project and transfer (Klontz, Bivens, Leinart, & Klontz, 2007). Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP) may have distinctive benefits from other forms of animal-assisted therapy, despite the fact that horses and owners may spend much less time together than humans do with companion animals such as dogs and cats (Yorke, Adams, & Coady, 2008) and may transcend certain aspects of human interaction, given

that equine-human relationships involve close physical contact that may foster deep connections (Brackenbridge & Shoemaker, 1996; Wipper, 2000; Taylor, 2001; Yorke, 2003; Brandt, 2004) and a bodily language through which rapport, intimacy, and mutual understanding between horse and rider may develop (Edgette, 1996).

In qualitative research conducted by Yorke et al., (2008), six participants who reported horses as being a crucial component of their recovery from a prior trauma engaged in semi-structured interviews and were observed while interacting with their horse(s). The relationships participants experienced with horses had practical, task-orientated, and emotional components, and were defined by participants as a democratic partnership involving mutual respect and effort, teamwork, and verbal and non-verbal communication. Partnership denoted "the symmetry of horse and rider, moving as one and working together, that evolves from proximity and length of relationship, and the clarity that comes with their knowledge of what to expect from each other, both physically and mentally" (Yorke et al., 2008, p. 24). In addition to this, Yorke et al., (2008) noted that partnering horses invoked a sense of togetherness, with trust and intimacy linked to the length of relationship between the participant and horse.

Another area in which the psychosocial benefits of horse-human interaction have been explored is learning programs that incorporate contact with horses. In PhD research on Equine-Assisted Learning, Smith (2012) explores how intra- and inter-personal skills, including reciprocity of care, can be learnt through "intentional partnering" (p. 3) of horses, a process he argues facilitates the development of humanity. A combination of equine-assisted learning and equine-assisted therapy, where horses act as co-facilitators in both therapeutic and learning interventions, has also received some support, with reported outcomes for a cohort of "at-risk" adolescents including increased mindfulness and a developed capacity to form trusting, attached relationships (Burgon, 2013). Finally, recent randomized control trials on the basal cortisol levels of adolescents following an eleven-week equine facilitated learning program showed strong causal effects such that adolescents in the experimental trial demonstrated consistently lower levels of cortisol at each measurement (Pendry, Smith, & Roeter, 2014). Given extant research tentatively suggests that lower basal cortisol levels may serve as a protective factor against the development of psychological and physical pathology, the findings of this study, although preliminary and subject to varying interpretations, provide support for the contention that contact with horses may carry a wide range of physical and psychological benefits.

3.3.2 Horse-Rider Communication

Human-horse communication may be deliberate, via specific cues, or unintentional, and either conscious or unconscious, such as occurs via body language, focus, intent, energy, and one's attitude (Widdicombe, 2008). Kiley-Worthington (2005) states that some common ground between individuals is a necessary prerequisite for communication, in the sense that recognition of (a) communication taking place and (b) what is being communicated, requires some level of understanding. What this means for equestrian dyads is not entirely clear, however, Brandt's (2004) research on horse-human communication has outlined the development of a horse-human language system that involves dynamic communication in which both horse and human are full participants and suggests the unexplored possibilities of interspecies communication. Further to this, Brandt (2004) identifies several purposes of horse-human communication, including an increase in the safety and humaneness of horse-human interaction, a decrease in horse-human conflict and the heightened capacity of the dyad to pursue specific goals (Brandt, 2004).

Horse-rider communication has been understood in a number of ways; but one key factor that defines this interaction is the physical size of horses. As Brandt (2005) notes, a large body of symbolic interactionist literature has explored shared meanings in cat-human or dog-human relationships, yet unlike cats and dogs, horses are considerably larger than humans and with this, a certain element of risk is apparent, as will be addressed in relation to power and control in horse-rider relationships. The second factor that defines this interaction is the physicality of horse-rider interaction. Like human communication, horse-human communication may be understood as combining elements of verbal and non-verbal exchange, yet unlike human dyads, much of the shared meaning transmitted between horse and rider arguably occurs on a physical, rather than linguistic level (Argent, 2012). Pressure and release cues are refined and become progressively more complex and nuanced as the "vocabularies" of both horse and rider expand (Brandt, 2004). As horse and rider continue to engage with each other and develop as a team, so their ability to communicate becomes increasingly refined, clear, and subtle (Brandt, 2004), and according to Shapiro (1990), may even take on a deeper embodied meaning, termed "kinaesthetic empathy." As will be explored in Chapter Four, bodily communication represents a less accepted, valid means of communication, yet a number of authors (cf. Argent, 2012; Brandt, 2005; Shapiro, 1990) have argued for the complexity and depth of

bodily, interspecies communication, drawing it into the realm of meaningful communication alongside spoken language.

In her research on horse-human communication, Brandt (2005) derives a new framework of thinking about language in interspecies relationships, arguing that horse and rider together create "an embodied language system," leading to "a world of shared meaning" (p. iii), even describing the "grammar" (p. 61) of this embodied language system. In the process, Brandt challenges the centrality of verbal language in scientific discourse and suggests that embodied communicative acts may have a significant impact upon mutual understanding in relation to (animal) others. Focusing exclusively on women's relationships with horses, Brandt (2005) argues for the authenticity and theoretical importance of women in relation to horses, challenging the dominant discourse around men's relationships with horses and noting how historically, images of the cowboy have symbolized what she refers to as "authentic" relationships with horses.

Argent (2012) has also analysed how subjectivity and agency are achieved in horse-human relationships through physical synchronisation between horse and rider, arguing that a kind of collective cognition develops between horse and rider, creating an interspecies corporeal synchrony. She describes how horses do this naturally amongst themselves, running as a pack without jostling or trampling each other, while Rifá (1990) has identified varying degrees of physical synchronicity in groups of horses, particularly between mare and foal. Argent (2012) documents the phenomenon of foot-for-foot synchrony that horses may achieve with other horses and with humans, whether moving together side-by-side, or in the saddle, where the movements of a rider's hips and seat mirror the horse's leg movements. Based on this, Argent (2012) argues that not only do horses have a well-developed propensity to communicate in nonverbal ways, they have a finely developed ability to assess a human's "intentionality" (p. 117), making seemingly telepathic communication between species possible. This leads her to question whether horses may find moving together with another species a transcendent and enjoyable experience, as humans do when they move together with another human or with a horse.

Other researchers, such as Kiley-Worthington (2005) have suggested that horses enjoy moving in groups with other horses, and possibly, also enjoy moving together with humans. Davis (2005) notes that the bond and affection shared by some equestrian dyads constitutes a joyful and satisfying exchange for both parties and that while it is difficult to know what the horse experiences, it does appear some horses truly look forward to their work and appear eager to please their riders. If horses do enjoy synchronous movement

with humans, then it may be argued that sporting pursuits represent an enjoyable act of mutuality for not just riders, but also for horses. This view only holds though, Argent (2012) notes, if we see horses as “co-actors” (p. 122), not if we see them as passive, non-agentic creatures. An agentic view of horses, Argent (2012) argues, aligns with the experience of riding where one “asks” rather than “tells” (p. 122) and as Hearne (2007) suggests, the horse maintains its volition and a certain measure of control over the interaction that occurs.

Contrary to this, however, Pretty and Bridgeman (2005) suggests that to fully understand the remarkable nature of equestrian sports, one must remember that not only is competitive sport of no intrinsic interest to the horse, but the acts of equestrian sport likely threaten the horse’s intrinsic urge to self-preservation (Pretty & Bridgeman, 2005). It is possible to conceive how both views may possess validity, while both perspectives may have interesting ramifications for horse-rider relationships. One of the most challenging aspects of horse-rider communication is that, as noted by Bartle and Newsum (2004), not all our communication is intentional; we send numerous signals to the horse that it is supposed to ignore, while expecting it to react and respond in a certain manner to other signals, creating the potential for misunderstanding and conflict. According to the British Horse Society (1982), the essence of horsemanship lies in training horses with such clarity that a rapport between partners leads to virtually unobservable communicatory exchanges.

3.3.3 Power and Control in Horse-Human Relations

Questions of power and control have long dominated the spectrum of training methods and practices that surround horse-rider interaction, while a variety of different perspectives on the status of modern sport horses exist. As Graysmith (2008) writes, via their relationships with humans, horses may invoke images of both freedom and tameness, while Birke (2008) observes that popular equestrian culture is littered with paradoxical references to freedom and control, with horse enthusiasts describing the liberty of the modern horse amidst discussion of practices designed to increase their control over the animal. The wild, untamed horse is a powerful and revered symbolic image; at odds with this is the pleasure and pride mankind takes in taming horses (Chamberlin, 2007). As van Dierendonck and Goodwin (2005) note, the trainability of horses has the potential to foster either subjugation or relational closeness with humans. Referring to the evolutionary social habits of horses, van Dierendonck and Goodwin (2005) juxtapose co-operative training

approaches with dominance-submission training paradigms, arguing that the horse's social behaviour and habits make it a candidate for both approaches, insofar as social relations between horses are characterised by both social facilitation and dominance behaviours.

Early horse training methods typically engaged physically aggressive methods of 'breaking' horses 'in', with "brute force" (Goodwin, McGreevy, Waran, and McLean, 2009, p. 7). In reaction to this, a set of "New Age", natural horsemanship training strategies that relied upon "gentle, nonviolent training techniques" (McLean, 2003, p. 17) developed from the early 1980s. This approach encourages participants to engage empathically with the horse in light of its natural and instinctive behavioural repertoires. Training is conducted with conscious awareness of the principles of dominance and submission, whereby one seeks to develop submission and respect in the horse towards a dominant human, without using inherently forceful techniques. Yet a tension between control and freedom is nonetheless apparent, despite the fact that natural horsemanship advocates promote handling horses as naturally as possible using the principles of horse psychology, horse evolution, and communication. For instance, natural methods are sometimes paradoxically used to enable the performance of highly unnatural horse behaviours, and as Goodwin et al., (2009) argues, while it may be appealing to think of entering a horse's social infrastructure and learning to "speak horse" (p. 7), little evidence suggests that humans possess the skills required to truly enter the horse's social hierarchy and interact using the same principles of intra-species interaction.

The anthropocentric language used by the natural horsemanship movement (cf. Roberts, 1997) has also been criticized for encouraging unrealistic models of horse-human interaction. Birke (2008) contends that the natural horsemanship movement sits at the juncture between two contradictory ways of thinking about and relating to horses. On one hand, the movement relies upon a kind of "quasi-scientific narrative" (Birke 2008, p. 107), based on an ethological understanding of equine instincts; on the other, as McLean (2003) and Birke (2008) point out, natural horsemanship has fostered discourses of "respect," "love," and "partnership," in which horses take on an almost human quality.

3.3.4 Conflict and Horse Wastage

Despite the mythological connection between horse and rider, the relationship between horses and humans has not always been of a harmonious nature. Indeed, McLean and McLean (2008) note that a large number of horses that are discarded and sold for meat,

commonly referred to as horse wastage, are abandoned due to unresolvable behavioural conflicts between horse and rider. Moreover, while injuries in equestrian sport have a relatively low incidence rate compared to other sports, the severity of horse-riding injuries tends to be high with relatively high mortality rates accorded to equestrian sport (Cripps & Pagano, 2002) and around a quarter of severe injuries labelled life-threatening (Johnson, 2014). Research by Ingemarson, Grevsten, and Thoren (1989) and Lincoln (2008) suggest the majority of horse-related injuries are caused by falls, crushing injuries inflicted by the horse falling on the rider, and kicks.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, anxiety has been identified as a relevant issue for equestrian athletes (Tenenbaum, Lloyd, Pretty, & Hanin, 2002; Hogg & Hodgins, 2009), while research indicates a circular relationship between sporting accidents/injuries and anxiety (Janelle, 2002). Horses are also deeply attuned to and receptive of fear emotions, particularly, Wipper (2000) suggests, athletic, highly-strung performance horses whose sensitive temperaments make them excellent competition horses, but challenging riding partners. These factors, together with available data on horse wastage, suggest that horse-human interaction may not always adhere to the connectedness that Game (2001) describes between horse and human. The dynamics between horse and rider deserve careful consideration to identify how to avoid conflict that leads to an increased risk of accidents, injuries, and horse wastage.

3.4 Equestrian Sport

The term “equestrian sport” may refer to a range of sporting activities involving horses; however, in this study it is used to refer to non-racing sports in which equestrian dyads may compete at an international level. This includes but is not limited to the sports of dressage, showjumping, and eventing, as well as endurance riding, para-dressage, and equestrian vaulting. Because of their inclusion in the Olympic Games, eventing, dressage, and showjumping make up the primary equestrian sporting domains and as the majority of participants in the current study were drawn from these disciplines, these disciplines will be outlined first. Derived from the French word *dresser*, meaning “training,” dressage has been called “the pinnacle of riding finesse” (Whitaker & Whitelaw, 2007, p. 140) and in context to its inclusion in three-day eventing, “the ultimate obedience test” (Bryant, 2008). Dressage involves the performance of artistic, gymnastic movements (Pretty & Bridgeman,

2005), with tests of increasing difficulty designed to demonstrate the horse's physical ability and training (Whitaker & Whitelaw, 2007).

The combination of art and sport in dressage (Davis, 2005) is evident in the way horse and rider are judged. Grand Prix Freestyle marks, for instance, are divided between the technical and artistic quality of the test (Bryant, 2008). Horse-rider combinations are marked for each individual test movement and on the basis of four collective areas of competence: the freedom and regularity of the horse's paces, the impulsion or elasticity and engagement of the horse's movement, evidence of submission, and the correctness of the rider's position and aids (FEI, 2014e). Performances are evaluated by one to five qualified judges, depending on the level of the test (Pretty & Bridgeman, 2005), and even at the elite level, dyads do well to achieve a score above 70%, indicative of the difficulty of the sport. Of all equestrian disciplines, dressage has perhaps consciously accorded the most significance to the relationship between horse and rider, in that performances are judged in part according to the harmony of the dyad (FEI, 2014e), conceived according to the rhythm, relaxation, energy, confidence (Pretty & Bridgeman, 2005; Peham, Licka, Kapaun, & Scheidl, 2001), and understanding (FEI, 2015) between horse and rider.

Eventing is the equestrian equivalent of the triathlon (FEI, 2014a), in which horse and rider undertake three phases of competition, dressage, eventing, and showjumping. A derivative of cavalry riding, eventing traditionally served as a test of "battle-fitness" for officers and horses (Crossman & Walsh, 2011; FEI, 2014a). The dressage phase tests the horse's obedience and physical ability and the cross-country phase at the elite, four star (****) level requires horses to make between thirty to forty jumping efforts over natural, solid obstacles at speed, including logs, stone walls, water obstacles, and ditches (FEI, 2014a). The cross-country phase provides a solid test of the horse's stamina and jumping ability, and the rider's ability to control the horse and navigate the course at appropriate speeds (FEI, 2014a). The final test is the showjumping phase, designed to assess the horse's agility and recovery from the previous day of cross-country jumping.

Showjumping represents one of the most financially affluent, popular, and sponsored elite equestrian sporting domains. Like the jumping phase of the eventing competition, the horse's speed, agility, courage, and general physical ability are tested over a course of ten to thirteen unstable obstacles, with penalties awarded for dislodging a rail, a refusal by the horse, a fall of horse or rider, and/or exceeding the time limit (Bryant, 2008; FEI, 2014b). The prize money on offer at elite-level competitions is substantial. The Longines Global Champion Tour series boosted a record-breaking prize money offer of

around nine million euros ($12 million US dollars) in 2014, with a number of elite showjumping riders winning over one million euros in prize money in recent years (Global Champions Tour BV, 2014). Showjumpers must make a number of decisions in quick succession: the line of approach to each fence, placement of the horse to take off (Pretty & Bridgeman, 2005), and the length of the horse's stride, whilst also considering their own position and its impact on the horse's balance and confidence.

Para-equestrian dressage requires horse and rider to complete specific movements in a series of dressage tests and was only formally recognised as a Paralympic sport in 1996 (FEI, 2014c; Horsetalk.co.nz, 2010). Para- and able-bodied dressage share many common features, with para-riders often competing against able-bodied riders outside of elite para-competitions (deHaan & Winfield, 2008). Para-riders are classified into six disability groups according to their functional level of impairment (FEI, 2014c) with compensating aids such as the use of more than one whip often permitted (Equestrian Australia, 2014b). deHaan and Winfield (2008) note that rather than forming partnerships with horses over time, traditionally para-equestrians have been subject to a ballot system, with competitors at both the Atlanta (1996) and Sydney (2000) Olympic Games competing on borrowed horses with whom they became familiar in the lead-up to the Games, though this practice is diminishing.

Vaulting represents a unique equestrian sport, a form of gymnastics that, like dressage, combines theatre, art, and sport via the athletic and personal skills required of gymnastics and horse sports (Equestrian Australia, 2014c). Vaulters may compete individually or in teams and perform a series of movements that include shoulder and handstands, mounts and dismounts, cartwheels and, in team situations, lifting a team member up into the air whilst amount a cantering horse (FEI, 2014c). Such manoeuvres clearly require high levels of balance and coordination (Equestrian Australia, 2014c). Vaulting is relatively unique as an equestrian sport in that men and women do not compete against each other in individual competitions. The FEI (2014c, para 1) states that vaulting "demands…a harmonious relationship with the horse" while Equestrian Australia (2014c) describes the need for vaulters to be confident in their mount and familiar with the horse's movements and rhythm. Vaulter and horse may engage in different ways than in alternate equestrian sports, in that vaulters often do not own or keep their horses at home, as vaulting clubs typically have several horses that are shared by club members (Equestrian Australia, 2014d), while the lunger, not the vaulter, is responsible for maintaining the horse's pace (FEI, 2014c), adding another dimension to horse-vaulter relationships.

Vaulting is not currently included in Olympic competitions, but elite level competitions include the FEI World Equestrian Games, as well as an FEI World Cup and a continental Championship (FEI, 2014c).

Endurance riding officially became a horse sport in the early 1900s (Reuter, 2010) and involves long-distance competition over varying terrain in which performance is measured in accordance with the capacity to cover a distance of 80 to 400 kilometres. Compulsory veterinary assessment of the horse occurs every 40 kilometres, with only horses deemed "fit to continue" eligible to win a competition (Equestrian Australia, 2014a). Endurance sports are a part of FEI competitions, such as the World Equestrian Games, but are not included in the Olympic program, though some have suggested this may occur in the future (Bryant, 2008). Endurance racing is heralded as one of the most physically challenging equestrian sports outside of horse racing, and research by Fraipont et al., (2012) suggests the increased speed demands of endurance sports crucially increase the metabolic, musculosketal and cardiovascular efforts of horses. Given this, and the recent controversies surrounding the sport in relation to corruption and horse-welfare issues, some argue the sport risks being excluded from the FEI and banned altogether if horse welfare is not appropriately addressed (Cuckson, 2013).

3.4.1 Elite Equestrian Sport

Elite equestrian sports occupy an intriguing position between business and recreation, crossing the boundaries between sport, hobby, leisure, and work (Adelman & Knijnik, 2013), implicating human and animal lives in complex ways. Equestrian sports reflect a mixed milieu with respect to professionalization, however, making it difficult to identify the exact number of elite riders who work and train with horses on a full-time basis. Rudolph (2009) notes that while some devote their lives solely to equestrian sport, others engage in paid work outside of sport. The cost of participating in equestrian sport means that equestrian athletes are particularly likely as an athletic cohort to make a career out of their sporting involvement. Indeed, when all expenses are factored into the equation, the cost of keeping a single horse per year can equal or exceed $25,000, while elite horses may commonly cost six figures, with Coulter (2013) estimating that elite showjumpers may cost anywhere between $150,000 to several million dollars.

Elite equestrian sport represents a goal-oriented recreational pursuit (Endenburg, 1999), yet "sport" may occupy the status of recreational pursuit and formal work, with

research suggesting that professionalism and the ability to run an effective business are critical attributes for success in elite equestrian sport (Coulter, 2013). Dashper (2014) highlights the combined influence of military origins and amateuristic sporting values on elite equestrian sport, while in comparison to other sports, elite equestrian athletes are under uniquely high levels of pressure to survive financially. Attending a competition with lucrative prize money may cost a significant amount when entry fees, horse stall boarding fees, and travel expenses (for both horse and rider) are considered, while only the top placed riders are remunerated for competing (Rudolph, 2009). Moreover, equestrian athletes are able to compete well past the age at which most athletes would be considered competitive (cf. Kiger, 2012) making equestrian sport a viable lifelong source of employment for many elite riders.

Somewhat paradoxically, competitive success may serve to jeopardise the future of equestrian dyads, as successful horses commonly change hands, and riders, following a successful competition performance (Heuschmann, 2011). This was evident in the case of Charlotte Dujardin and Valegro, with Valegro's financial value skyrocketing to an estimated six million British pounds following their international success, creating enormous pressure on the owners to sell the horse lest his commercial value should unexpectedly decrease (Kessel, 2013). Although Dujardin had previously expressed a pragmatic, accepting attitude toward this possibility, more recently she revealed the tremendous stress she experienced as she faced the "impending loss" of Valegro (Kessel, 2013, para 1) in the lead-up to the London Olympics. In an article with The Guardian, Dujardin (as cited by Kessel, 2013, para 2) was quoted as saying, "Every competition I do I never know if it's the last one…It's always trying to put that to the back of your mind and carry on…." It is not uncommon for elite equestrian athletes to face such uncertainty; Mark Todd (2012) describes a similarly stressful period following his gold-medal winning performance with Charisma, while much has been written of the separation of dressage champions, Edward Gal and Totilas.

Further adding to the pressures faced by elite equestrian athletes is the demand for horses, either training or competition horses, to be produced quickly, while supply-and-demand ratios for high-level performance horses are such that large sums of money may be made from a promising young horse, as well as a successful competition horse (Heuschmann, 2011). As Heuschmann (2011, p. 18) states, in business "time is money" and for equestrians, time also represents risk as a horse worth six figures one weekend may be worth next to nothing the next should a freak accident or unexpected illness occur.

Heuschmann (2011) writes critically of riders who exploit horses due to an immense pressure to be successful, but is sympathetic regarding the pressure elite athlete's face, financial and performance-based, noting the dedication and sacrifice required, while also noting the difficulty of making a financially viable career out of equine pursuits. Highlighting the problems that may arise from commercially driven sports that involve and inevitably implicate animal welfare, Heuschmann (2011, p. 6) writes:

> There is nothing wrong with earning one's living through breeding or competition; however, one of the biggest threats to a traditional and time-tested training system may arise from the steadily growing economic interests of an ever larger number of people.

Figures presented by the American Horse Council Federation (AHCF) (2005) suggest that the equine industry involves over 7 million people, 6.9 million horses, and contributes around $112 billion to the American economy. The European Horse Network (n.d.) reports equally significant figures, estimating that horse-related endeavours contribute over $100 billion to the European economy on a yearly basis, while Australian figures place this estimate at around a $6.2 billion yearly contribution (Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation, 2001). While these figures include revenue relating to the racing industry, as well as other areas of competitive equestrian sport, the AHCF (2005) note that around 70% of the economic contribution comes from the showing and recreation sector, while Keaveney (2008) cites similar figures for other countries, concluding that "the multi-billion-dollar international equine market" (p. 445) rotates heavily around companion-based relationships between horses and humans outside of racing sports.

While the increased commercialisation of equestrian sport may have some positive effects, it has also been identified as a threat to the development of strong horse-rider relationships (Dashper, 2014). With increased financial investments, the meaning and value of both the horse and sporting success may change in important ways for elite competitors, with a failure to maintain one's competitive profile potentially jeopardising substantial financial deals. As an example of the commercial value associated with being a high-profile elite equestrian athlete, Rudolph (2009) notes the sponsorship arrangements showjumper, Rodrigo Pessoa, and dressage rider, Anky van Grunsven, have with companies such as Rolex and Volkswagon. Although equestrian sports constitute an extremely expensive pursuit (Buchanan & Dunn, 2006) and even elite-level riders may

struggle to remain financially viable (cf. King, 1998, Funnell, 2005; Fox-Pitt, 2009; Todd, 2012), high levels of success can result in lucrative sponsorship arrangements, particularly in the showjumping arena (Global Champions Tour BV, 2014). This may create a disjuncture not easy to resolve; as Rudolph (2009, p. 47) notes, "the tension between doing whatever it takes to win and ensuring a clean victory can stretch any competitor to the breaking point."

Established, compatible horse-rider relationships have been espoused as critical to competitive success in equestrian sport (McKernan, 2003; Wipper, 2000). Yet certain equestrian sporting practices may run counter to these prerogatives, while elite equestrian history suggests that riding unfamiliar horses to international victory is a legitimate possibility, bringing into question the role of the relationship between horse and rider in equestrian sport. In McKernan's (2003) research on eventing riders, the average equestrian dyad had been working together for less than three years, while the practice of riding another competitor's horse in competition, known colloquially as "catch-riding" pervades a number of equestrian sports. The "change of horse formula" in showjumping involves four finalists riding each other's horses in the final round of an elite competition, with riders only allowed to school each unfamiliar horse for a total of three minutes over just two jumps before the competition (FEI, 2010). Bailey (2010) states that the change-horse final provides a challenging test of horsemanship in which riders must quickly form relationships with each unfamiliar mount, as well as demonstrate flexible riding skills.

Catch-riding also occurs in eventing, with renowned New Zealand rider, Mark Todd, finishing first and third at Badminton Horse Trials, arguably one of the most difficult horse trials in the world, on two horses he had only sat on once before entering the competition arena (Todd, 1998). In the case of Horton Point, Todd (1998, p. 181) states that he felt "a bit nervous setting out on the cross-country on a horse I'd ridden for less than two hours," while with respect to The Irishman, he writes "Rodney and I are about the same height, so perhaps The Irishman didn't notice he had a different rider" (p. 72). While such short-term riding arrangements raise interesting questions about the role of the relationship between horse and rider, they do not necessarily imply that the relationship between horse and rider is irrelevant to elite equestrian sport. Horton Point's usual rider Lynne Bevan is cited as saying that Horton Point was, "….a funny old horse – if he doesn't like you, he won't go at all" (Todd, 1998, p. 180). Elite para-equestrians also frequently compete unfamiliar, borrowed horses, as has been noted. One sport in which riding unfamiliar horses does not typically occur is dressage and when the notion of horse-

swapping was raised in an interview with international British dressage rider Carl Hester, he responded:

> I'd love to do that….I don't know if I'd like everyone riding my horse, but I would erm….I don't know how you'd feel about that, I mean, I would, I would be very proud of the horse actually if it actually managed to do a good job with somebody else on it, I think that's the art of, you know, training and dressage. Anybody *should* be able to get on your horse and ride it, so it would be interesting (FEI World Equestrian Games Interview, 2014 August 24, 15:00-16:00 minutes).

Hester's assumption is that a well-trained horse has the ability to perform with any elite rider, yet he expresses some ambivalence about what horse-swapping practices might mean for the sport of dressage. Clearly, the formats of different equestrian disciplines may influence the horse-rider relationship and provide interesting avenues for discussing the relevance of this relationship to equestrian sporting performance. Finally, elite riders may experience a certain degree of pressure to maintain a consistent string of competition horses so that should one become injured, the rider's career and income is not derailed. Mark Todd (1998, p. 115) states, "where horses are concerned, you can never have too many strings to your bow". In addition, he describes his early career business plan as about "getting more horses, by buying or borrowing," noting how at least in the early years of his career, he would "get on anything" (p. 83). It may be that unlike their amateur counterparts, elite equestrian athletes ride and compete a large number of horses on a regular basis.

3.4.2 Horse-Rider Relationships in Sport

The relationship between horse and rider has been held as highly important to competitive success (Heuschmann, 2011; Pretty & Bridgeman, 2005), as well as a source of motivation for involvement in equestrian sport (Buchanan & Dann, 2006), with a range of research (cf. Bridgeman, 2009; McKernan, 2003; Wipper, 2000), along with anecdotal and autobiographical reports (cf. Collins, 2006; Fox-Pitt, 2009, Funnell, 2005; Rolton, 2001) centralising the horse-rider relationship as a basic requirement of equestrian sporting participation. Former World Champion, Olympic medallist and six-time winner of Badminton Horse Trials, Lucinda Green (1985, p. 52) states of the horse-rider relationship

in sport: "…confidence, harmony, partnership, call it what you like…it is difficult to pinpoint its ingredients, but it is easy to recognise when its presence is lacking." The emotional depth of the horse-human bond (cf. Lawrence, 1993) has been documented, yet the actual status of this relationship, particularly in the context of elite equestrian sports, remains unclear, with comparatively little scientific research directed at horse-human relationships (Bridgeman, 2009).

What do we know about the horse-rider relationship in sport? Scientific research (cf. Visser et al., 2003) and anecdotal reports suggest it is a complex relationship, with horse behaviour, rider skill, experience level, and personality all impacting upon the quality of the relationship (Meyners, 2004; Visser et al., 2008). In research on professional riders, Smart (2011) identifies communication, conflict, and powerful emotions as salient aspects of horse-human interaction, while Pretty (2001) states that a mental connection with one's horse is necessary to succeed in equestrian sports. This may be true, and Green (1985) may well be correct when she suggests it is possible to identify when a relationship between horse and rider does not exist, yet the connection between horse and rider is nonetheless difficult to evaluate, particularly in the context of subjective sporting performances (Stachurska, Pieta, Niewczas, & Markowski, 2006). Working successfully with horses has historically carried undertones of mysticism, with even religious and occult-like associations drawn upon (van Dierendonck & Goodwin, 2005). As Bridgeman (2009) notes, the topic of the horse-rider relationship is an emotional one, embedded in superstition and practices that have typically been documented anecdotally rather than empirically.

Intuitive, mystical views of horse-human interaction have been promoted by the concept of "horse whisperer," a notion that, as Argent (2012) suggests, leads to the idea that synchronicity between horse and human develops in esoteric and inaccessible ways. The process of building good relationships with horses has also traditionally been informally passed between horsemen, with little formal documentation of the knowledge and skills that result in harmonious horse-rider relationships (Bridgeman, 2009). Despite the relative paucity of literature on the horse-rider relationship from a sport psychology perspective, a number of researchers from other disciplines have considered horse-rider relationships, while a small number of sport psychology studies have been conducted. This section of the chapter summarises research from a range of disciplinary vantage points, with a multiplicity of perspectives and methodological heritages leading to a dynamic accumulation of ideas on this unique interspecies relationship.

Based on the premise that the horse-rider relationship is central to competitive success in the equestrian domain, McKernan (2003) used anecdotal accounts to devise a scale measuring the horse-rider relationship for eventing sports that assessed the compatibility, mutual respect, communication, trust, and mutual confidence between horse and rider. However, this scale failed to predict competitive success in equestrian athletes as expected, bringing into question both the validity of the scale, given some of the unexpected correlations between scale items and performance outcomes, and indeed the connection between performance outcomes and the horse-rider relationship. In a similar vein, Bridgeman (2009) explored the horse-rider relationship in equestrian sports in his PhD dissertation, developing several measures of the relationship, including a psychometric inventory completed by riders and observers, and a measure of heart rate synchronisation, theorised to provide a physiological indicator of the harmony between horse and rider. Although his general definition of the "working relationship" (p.2) between horse and rider is rather perfunctory, with respect to eventing, Bridgeman (2009) suggests that "courage, endurance, manageability, obedience, and suitability of both horse and rider…are indicative of a good working relationship" (p. 3).

Bridgeman's (2009) findings demonstrated greater heart rate synchronisation between horse and rider outside of competition settings, suggesting that the pressures of competition may represent a threat to the physical harmony between horse and rider, while no significant relationships were identified between rider and judge perceptions of the working relationship between horse and rider, and these ratings did not correlate meaningfully with heart rate synchronicity of horse and rider. Bridgeman (2009) suggests that the lack of a significant relationship between these factors may reside with his reliance on "expert opinion" and "anecdotal literature" (p. 164) in order to develop scale items to measure the working relationship between horse and rider. In addition, a more rigorous scale development and item analysis process (cf. DeVellis, 2003) might have resulted in a clearer picture of what, in fact, constitutes the relationship between horse and rider.

The elite sporting context represents an interesting niche in which to examine horse-rider relationships. In Australian research on the motivations of hobby- and competitive-equestrians, Buchanan and Dann (2006) found that while competitive riders were more motivated by competitive desires than by internal rewards, both cohorts identified love for horses as the main reason for their involvement in equestrian pursuits. Recreational and professional ways of interacting with horses may be distinguished (van Dierendonck & Goodwin, 2005); yet there is undoubtedly some overlap between the two,

particularly as the professionalization of equestrian sports continues to develop (Dashper, 2014). An emphasis on the emotional bond between horse and rider (Lawrence, 1993) tends to encourage the perception that horse-rider interaction is driven by attachment rather than economic prerogatives, yet some have questioned the status of the horse in sport (cf. McLean & McGreevy, 2010a). As well as increasing tension around the ethics of equestrian sport (cf. Campbell, 2013b), the commercial interests of mainstream equestrian sports such as dressage, showjumping, and eventing, are arguably causing a shift in the sport whereby riders are increasingly under pressure to perform well in order to maintain financially viable careers (Rudolph, 2009) that depend on competitive success in order to maintain reciprocally rewarding relationships with third-party owners and sponsors, upon whose financial support riders are typically dependent.

Building on the notion that using animals in sport may invoke ethical concerns, Dashper (2015) examined the development of horse-rider relationships using a multispecies ethnography with a sample of seventeen amateur riders. Her findings suggest that riders seek to attend to horses as individuals and as sentient beings, valuable beyond their commercial value, and to develop relationships with them that are mutually rewarding and oriented around a sense of partnership. Dashper (2015) also suggests, however, that a partnership between horse and rider does not negate the human-centric nature of sporting activities, thereby placing responsibility on those engaged with horses to protect their interests and welfare in an awareness of the asymmetry of understanding and engagement that undergirds interspecies sport. In another ethnographic study by Dashper (2014), it was revealed that structural forces within an elite sporting context may impact the horse-rider relationship, with participants expressing a tension between personal and commodity-based valuations of horses in sport. Dashper (2014) identifies the increasing financial value of elite horses, reliance on third party owners, and the pressure to obtain sporting results quickly, as threats to the development of strong horse-rider relationships. Although a range of studies have addressed the more esoteric dimensions of horse-human interaction and these will be documented next, Dashper's (2015) research has been ground-breaking in identifying how contextual factors in elite sport may crucially impact upon horse-rider interaction, and is thus particularly relevant to the focus of the current study.

From an anthropological viewpoint, Maurstad, Davis, and Cowles (2013) describe how a sense of co-being may arise between horse and rider in a study that involved sixty qualitative interviews with horse-riders. Participants described embodied experiences of mutuality with horses whereby being in sync, even if a fleeting, momentary experience,

defined the connection between horse and rider. Furthermore, Maurstad et al., (2013) indicates how participants elaborated on the individuality of their horses, creating an image of a subject, rather than an object, with a mind and agency of its own. Evans and Franklin's (2010) work also details the synergistic experience that may result between horse and rider through horse-riding. They suggest that in the act of horse-riding, movement and emotion are harnessed to create a synergy between horse and rider that is experienced by riders as a partnership, and that this experience transcends the more mechanical building blocks of training and creates a sense of collective rhythm between horse and rider. In keeping with Argent's (2012) research on the manifestations of physical synchrony between horses and humans, Evans and Franklin (2010) describe how the concept of entrainment and the variation in brain wave activity, breathing, and heart beat that occurs as a result of synchronization with another individual, may apply to equestrianism, resulting in a "rhythmic harmony" (p. 179) between horse and rider.

Research supports the notion that harmony between horse and rider may be achieved via synchrony of movement and that this physical harmony may be measurable (Peham et al., 2001). In a study examining the consistency of motion patterns for forty equestrian dyad combinations using a high-speed 3D video tracking system which measured angular velocity and acceleration, Peham et al., (2001) found that more advanced horse-rider dyads had significantly lower deviations in the lengths of resulting vectors than recreational dyads. Moreover, the motion patterns of professional dyads were found to be correlated with the pair's average dressage score, which were significantly higher for professional riders than for recreational riders. As noted by Peham et al., (2001) this technology may provide an objective measure of harmony between horse and rider in competitive dressage competitions, and an alternative to measuring synchronisation via horse-rider heart rates.

Other studies have also provided support for the measurability of physical harmony between horse and rider. For instance, Bridgeman and Pretty (2007) found that physiological harmonisation in the heart rate of both horse and rider occurs more strongly with advanced rather than novice dressage horses. Bridgeman and Pretty (2007) also found that dressage judges' scores for the harmony between horse and rider mirrored these physiological findings, with the more advanced, heart-rate synchronised combinations scoring higher than the novice combinations. These findings indicate a link may exist between physical and subjective measures of harmonisation and success in equestrian sports. The ability to develop a feel for horses has been linked to harmony (Coffin, 1978),

with Schaefer (2003) describing “feel” as the most important quality of an equestrian athlete. A somewhat ambiguous concept, “feel” may be understood as a psychological, mental, and physical construct, cultivated as the rider learns to adapt, react intuitively and sensitively, and utilise their physical elasticity and coordination to communicate effectively with the horse (Schaefer, 2003), allowing them to experience the movements of their horse more intensely and consciously (Holzel & Holzel, 1996). Another relevant dimension of horse-rider relationships may be cooperation, with Visser et al., (2008) associating this quality with improved performance outcomes and increases in horse welfare.

Compatibility has also been cited as critical (Wipper, 2000); some horses and riders simply appear to work together better than others, even where both parties are highly skilled such as the elite context (Visser et al., 2008). Intriguing examples of rapport between horse and rider have been repeatedly documented in popular literature (Wipper, 2000). On an anecdotal level, equestrian sporting history is coloured by striking horse-rider relationships. Olympic and World Champions Reiner Klimke and Ahlerich, John Whitaker and Milton, Mark Todd and Charisma, and Isabel Werth and Gigolo, Anky van Grunsven and Bonfire, and in recent years, Edward Gal and Totilas, and Charlotte Dujardin and Valegro, have become the icons of equestrian sport. Despite the talent of the aforementioned dyads, one may argue that neither each respective horse nor their rider would have found a place in equestrian history without the formation of a remarkable relationship (Bartle & Newsum, 2004).

Many equestrian commentators questioned this phenomenon after the Dutch Warmblood Totilas was sold to a German rider, with the sale announced days after Edward and Totilas became the most successful horse-rider dressage combination in history. With a nod to the commercial pressures of elite equestrian sport, Forrest (2012) writes that Totilas was sold to a German sports-horse mogul for a rumoured fifteen million euros. At his next international competition, Totilas, the first dressage horse to ever score above 90 in competition, appeared “constrained, tense, and miserable” (Hsieh, 2013, para 2). Such was the public reaction to Totilas’s apparent demise that some have questioned if this influenced buyers when talk of Valegro being sold surfaced, with concern that, given the relationship between Dujardin and Valegro, the horse may never achieve a high level of success with a different rider (Kessel, 2013).

3.4.3 "Partnerships" in Equestrian Sport

Literature on horse-rider interaction in sport is replete with references to "the partnership" between horse and rider, with equestrian commentators (cf. Bryant, 2008) and members of the elite equestrian fraternity (cf. Heuschmann, 2011) alike using the term to refer to horse-rider dyads in sport. Pretty and Bridgeman (2005) argue that equestrian sport depends upon the horse-rider partnership, while Adelman and Knijnik (2013) use the term to describe horse-rider relations, as does historian, David Shaw (2013), along with Smart (2011) and Whitaker and Whitelaw (2007). The autobiographies and books of equestrian athletes such as Mary King (1998), Pippa Funnell (2005), William Fox-Pitt (2009), Carl Hester (2014) and Mark Todd (1998, 2012) also use this term to describe the horse-rider relationship. Although in some instances its usage appears colloquial in nature, it is certainly a widely used descriptor, and as Cooperrider and Whitney (2005, p. 30) put it, "words create worlds even in unintended ways."

The context in which the term "partnership" is used implies that it is a positive construct, even a euphemism for success. Pickeral (2006), for instance, describes the shift in artistic depictions of horse-human relations from dominance to partnership, implying an antithetical relationship between the two ways of relating to horses, while Dr. Uwe Schulten-Baumer (as cited by Collins, 2006), one of the most successful trainers and coaches in dressage history, endorses the same notion, positioning partnerships as oppositional to viewing a horse as a sporting tool. In his critique of equestrian art, Turnbull (2010) associates mutuality or reciprocity with a partnership, while Evans and Franklin (2010) suggest that a partnership is more powerful than coercion in enabling joint acts of embodied physical movement between horse and rider. Gilbert and Gillett (2012) specifically link the term to sport-based human-horse interaction, denoting a new identity-based category of horses as sport partners, wherein the horse's value lies in its physical capital as a performance animal and its ability to form meaningful relationships with humans.

Some have been critical of this term as it applied to horse-rider dyads, however, with McLean (2003) noting how "a framework of mutual partnership" (p. 11) represents a linguistic act of anthropomorphism that prevents the equestrian industry from recognising how the human perspective prevents us from truly understanding horses. Furthermore, McLean (2003) suggests we take this view of horses because we see in them "what we

want to believe" (p. 12), with such narratives having deleterious effects on horse training, the horse-rider relationship, and horse welfare (p. 10):

> Folklore and equestrian traditions have led us to believe that the relationship between horses and humans is virtually preordained. We think of this relationship in terms of mutual benefit and define it with words like "trust" and "partnership" that imply an equal motivation towards a common goal….We hear Olympic-standard equestrian competitors ascribe their achievements to the partnership with their horse, the high levels of mutual trust and confidence, and the horse's bravery and willingness Yet, for every so-called "brave," "determined," and "loyal" horse there is apparently another that is "lazy," "stubborn" or even "bad."

If we see our horses as being loyal or good, McLean suggests, we may also charge them with being lazy, mean, and motivated in their misbehaviour, while in viewing horses as intelligent and brave, we run the risk of charging them with higher levels of moral responsibility than is appropriate. Budiansky (1997) also cautions his readers to consider their "unexamined assumptions" about horses (p. 62) and recognise that understanding the horse's "true nature" (p. 62) means not just looking to science for answers, but unseating "6,000 years of accumulated legend, myth, and sentiment" (p. 62), suggesting that personal sentiment may serve as a veritable blind-spot when forming judgments about horse-human interaction. Both Budiansky (1997) and McLean (2003) make appeals to human rationality, but to what extent do these principles correlate with how riders experience their daily interaction with horses?

Two of Britain's most successful eventing riders, Pippa Funnell (2005) and William Fox-Pitt (2009) both use language to describe their horses that contradicts McLean's views, with Funnell describing one of her eventing horses as "brave," and "a party-lover" (p. 93), and Fox-Pitt describing how he "immediately struck up a good partnership" (p. 47) with Steady, an early horse in his career. Former elite equestrian athlete and coach, Christopher Bartle, also writes of equestrian partnerships, noting how each partner develops a clear understanding of his responsibilities, and trusts the other to take responsibility for what is not within his own power or ability to control (Bartle & Newsum, 2004). Some tensions are evident within this narrative, however, while the ability of the horse to "understand" his responsibilities is not analysed in detail, and Bartle acknowledges that the rider is the "senior partner" (Bartle & Newsum, 2004). Nonetheless,

equestrian athletes clearly make attributions about their horses, with research by Tompkins and Pretty (2000) finding that it was dressage riders' ratings of their horse's mental state, rather than their own mental state, that were consistently related to performance outcomes.

In an in-depth appraisal of the horse-rider partnership, Wipper (2000) examined eventing dyads from a sociological, qualitative perspective with particular attention to the elements of a partnership and the processes involved in developing and maintaining a partnership. Drawing on textual and auditory sources that included books, equestrian magazines, commentaries of equestrian events, and informal telephone conversations, Wipper (2000) found the phrase was commonly used by riders to describe the relationship they aimed to experience with their horses, with successful partnerships based on respect, trust, confidence, and close communication. Wipper (2000) also reported that a key dimension of success in equestrian sports was the ability of the rider to view the environment or riding situation from the perspective of their horse. Wipper's findings suggest that the partnership between horse and rider may range from authoritarian to egalitarian, though the former would not typically be considered a "partnership" in a true sense, while certain parallels may be drawn between human and interspecies partnerships, based on the criteria Wipper (2000) creates for horse-rider partnerships.

Although limited to eventing riders, Wipper's research represents a valuable starting point in generating an understanding of the meaning and status of the horse-rider partnership in modern sport, though it is interesting to consider whether her conceptions apply to other sporting domains. Eventing is widely considered the most dangerous of equestrian sports (van Gilder Cooke, 2012) and includes a dressage phase in which the harmony of the horse-rider dyad is examined, while other sports such as showjumping do not have this requirement and, with dressage, are not considered as physically dangerous as eventing. It is therefore interesting to consider how the concept of partnership applies to equestrian sports where risk is less salient.

Another study that has identified a partnership as descriptive of the connection between horse and rider in equestrian sport was conducted by Keaveney (2008). Using an interpretive phenomenological analysis involving participant observation, in-depth interviews, and the critical-incident technique, Keaveney (2008) examined how the horse-human relationship operates as a unique category of animal companionship. Study findings suggest that the physicality of horse-rider interaction, along with experiences of shared adversity and spiritual experiences of flow, define riders' experiences of horse-rider relationships (Keaveney, 2008). Further to this, a partnership was understood by

participants as a "working relationship" (p. 449) in which the horse is seen as a companion animal but also as a working partner, with shared goals identified as important, though Keaveney (2008) does not directly address the implications of these attributions.

3.4.4 Power Dynamics in Equestrian Sport

The status of horses in an equestrian sporting context may have important implications for the horse-rider relationship. Sport horses are worth, in many cases, large sums of money and yet, unlike racehorses, they are often housed in close proximity to the humans who work with them, and may spend significant periods of their lives working with the same set of humans. As Bridgeman (2009) suggests, the status accorded to horses, albeit that of pet, sporting tool, companion, or equivalent to intimate relationship figure such as a family member or child, may influence the rider's approach to training and general behaviour around horses in important ways. Legendary equestrian, Klaus Balkenhol (as cited by Collins, 2006) suggests that horses are neither pets nor commodities; however, he acknowledges that some horses are largely a profit-enterprise, while on the other side, Keaveney (2008) resists the notion of a horse-as-pet, but acknowledges that horse-human relationships contributes to knowledge of companion-based interspecies interaction.

Equestrians are commonly reminded not to think of the horse as a piece of sporting equipment (cf. Holzel & Holzel, 1996). According to Coffin (1978) horses are not "machines" but conscious beings capable of experiencing affection and hatred, pleasure and pain, fear and confidence. Balkenhol (as cited by Collins, 2006) espouses equality in horse-rider relationships, stating, "He [the rider] should never treat his horse as a mechanical thing, or act like he has a contract with a machine" (p. 8). Yet power exchanges between horse and human are complex; to suggest that a horse is not an object is not to deny the possibility that it may be treated as one. Humans may be able to dominate and exploit horses, however, the horse's physical size represents a source of very real power, with most humans weighing around 10-15% of the horse's body weight (Brandt, 2004). Nonetheless, as Budiansky (1997) contends, whilst physically stronger than their human counterparts, horses are remarkably submissive, and as a preyed-upon-species, may be vulnerable to being dominated.

Gendered interpretations of power and control have also been offered with respect to horse-rider relationships, particularly given the gendered dynamics of equestrian sport

(Adelman & Knijnk, 2013). Masculinity has traditionally been connected to, rather than threatened by, participation in equestrian sport, yet the recent surge in female participants has, some have argued, "feminized" the sport and contributed to a shift in the horse's status over time (Hedenborg, 2007). Olympic equestrian sports developed from military origins (Bryant, 2008) and therefore were inherently dominated by male participants, however, as Dashper (2013) and others have noted, equestrian sports are unique in that men and women compete against each other and at an Olympic level, have done so since 1952, although this is not the case for individual equestrian vaulters. Régnier, Heas, and Calmet (2012) note that for women, equestrian pursuits are often viewed as revolving around a love of horses, while for men, the attraction lies in the love of riding. This may be an oversimplification, for in reality, as research by Gilbert and Gillet (2013) on polo club riding suggests, female participants are typically motivated by a love of horses and competition.

Equestrian sports are dangerous and action-oriented, but also require the ability to communicate effectively and care for an animal; thus both feminine and masculine traits may be implicated in the skills required to succeed (Plymoth, 2013). Knijnik (2013) has argued that masculinity and femininity are fluid and blurred in relation to engagement with horses, while Brandt (2005) suggests that accounts of men in relation to horses have traditionally dominated those of women, inadvertently reinforcing the illegitimacy of women's relationships with horses. In an analysis of juvenile fiction on horse-human relations, Singleton (2013) argues that the relationship between women and horses is commonly discursively domesticated, while Graysmith (2008) argues that women achieve power and freedom through embodying the horse; men are either masculinized or emasculated by them. The traditional orientation between masculinity and training horses creates a relational dynamic in which horses may or may not be loved, but are taught through intimidation and sometimes abuse, furthering images of masculine power (Swabe, 2000). With women now dominating equestrian sporting pursuits, at least at amateur levels, Miller (2000) and McKernan (2003) suggest that a more cooperative relational dynamic between horse and rider may evolve over time.

3.4.5 Horse-Rider Relationships and Sporting Performance

To what extent is the performance of equestrian dyads influenced by the relationship between horse and rider? Research suggests that the horse-rider relationship

strongly influences performance outcomes, with both Pretty and Bridgeman (2005) and Visser et al., (2008) arguing that the success of horse-rider dyads depends on the rider's ability to establish a relationship based on mutual trust, communication, and submission. Yet as Visser et al., (2008) contends, evaluating the interaction between horse and rider is a difficult task and therefore establishing a link between the relationship and performance is also complex. To some extent a strong, positive relationship might be expected between the horse-rider relationship and performance attainments, yet, as noted by Stachurska et al., (2006), there is often great variation in the opinions of different judges as to what constitutes a technically correct performance in equestrian sporting domains such as dressage. This has led to ambivalence around some sporting results, and questions as to whether or how they reflect a true harmony between horse and rider, while the extent to which equestrian judging aligns with the ethical prerogatives of the FEI has also been questioned (cf. Wolframm, 2010; Wolframm, Schiffers, & Wallenborn, 2011).

3.4.6 Moral, Ethical, and Welfare Concerns in Equestrian Sport

The ethics of competitive equestrian sports are increasingly coming into question, and not just with respect to jumps-and flat-racing (cf. Campbell, 2013b; McLean & McGreevy, 2010a; Jones & McGreevy, 2010). Traditionally sporting pursuits involving horses have garnered much public favour, yet the negative aspects of using horses in sport is increasingly being considered by the general public, the media (Jurga, 2014), and by scientific practitioners, with McLean and McGreevy (2010a) even referring to horsemanship and horse-riding as "a type of exploitation" (p. 203) and "enslavement" (p. 204). Further to this, Jones and McGreevy (2010) question whether the multi-billion dollar use of horses for recreational, competitive, and entertainment purposes is justifiable given the poor welfare outcomes for some of the horses involved, while the physical and psychological challenges associated with elite equestrian sport have led some to question whether animal suffering would be avoided were equestrian sports to be abolished (Campbell, 2013a).

The elite competition context has been linked to activities of a maximum degree of strenuousness, acute/chronic horse injuries resulting from strenuous challenges, and long-distance travel to highly unfamiliar and therefore stressful environments (Jones & McGreevy, 2010). Some aspects of equestrian sport build upon the horse's "natural" instincts; others do not, and may therefore represent a source of threat and stress to horses

(Chamberlin, 2007). Sport is also inevitably a human-driven pursuit (Budiansky, 1997), though as Dashper (2015) contends, this does not automatically mean that equestrian sport is exploitative, though it does suggest the potential for exploitation, leading to questions about the boundaries between the use and abuse of horses in sport (Campbell, 2013b).

The "win-at-all-costs" mentality, although not necessarily widespread within equestrian circles, has manifested itself in shocking cases of horse abuse (Sneed, 2014), that serve to jeopardise the future of equestrian sports, the reputed "bond" between horse and human, and most importantly, the welfare of horses involved in the human pursuit for sporting glory (McLean & McGreevy, 2010a). Heuschmann (2011), a veterinary expert in biomechanics and vocal critic of "forceful" (p. ix) training methods, writes critically of modern riders, noting that for many, the drive to compete overrides "the joy of training a horse" (p. 1). Footage of Danish dressage rider, Andreas Helgstrand riding a young horse with rein contact so tight the horse's tongue was visibly blue, caused shock and disgust within the equestrian community, with footage of the incident shared on social media around 7,000 times within just ten days (Jurga, 2014). Epona.tv (2013) reported that in addition to issues with Helgstrand's riding, the horse was suffering from respiratory problems at the time of the competition, with Helgstrand choosing to compete despite the fact that this meant discontinuing the horse's medication in order to meet doping rules and ensure he could compete at the European Championships. A statement defending his conduct (cf. Helgstrand Dressage, 2014) did little to assuage the discontent and distress of the equine community and the public at the incident.

Competitive equestrian sports have been blighted by a range of practices with possible welfare ramifications for horses, including hyperflexion amongst dressage horses (McGreevy, Harman, McLean, & Hawson, 2010) and soring (DeHaven, 2000) amongst gaited horses, the practice of excoriating the skin using chemicals to encourage exaggerated movement (The Humane Society of the United States of America, 2014). Despite being illegal under federal law, practices such as soring continue to pervade some equestrian sports (Sneed, 2014). Other practices include gingering, whereby a rectal irritant is applied to the horse to encourage high tail carriage, while doping and drug misuse is also not uncommon in equestrian sport, and neither are gastric ulcers from competitive and travel-based stress (Campbell, 2013b). Another particularly grievous practice is that of using chemicals or sharp objects to heighten the sensitivity of the horse's legs while showjumping (McLean & McGreevy, 2010a). In one extreme case, Sneed (2014) notes a competitor was suspended from showing and judging Arabian horses after it was found

that seven of his horses had undergone cosmetic surgery aimed at improving their appearance based on competitive ideals.

The increasing commercialisation and professionalization of equestrian sports presents a challenge to horse welfare and the horse-rider relationship (van Dierendonck & Goodwin, 2005). As Bridgeman (2009) notes, successful elite horses are now a multi-million dollar commodity item to owners, breeders, and other investors in equestrian sport. Elite horses may be cared for using state of the art technologies and feeding products, yet Henderson (2007) argues that basic psychological well-being may be compromised by the very practices designed to ensure an elite horse's safety, well-being, and continued performance success. The risk of injury to horses worth large sums of money means that many elite competitors choose to house their horses in restrictive environments in which the horse is intensively managed (van Dierendonck & Goodwin, 2005) and although safer than more natural arrangements, such living conditions may have other deleterious welfare implications for horses (Henderson, 2007) as well as spin-off effects for the horse-human relationship (Hausberger, Roche, Henry, & Visser, 2008). Furthermore, as Endenburg (1999) notes, demands are being placed on competition horses at an earlier age than ever before, meaning that the horse may not be physically fully developed by the time its competitive life begins, while Derksen and Clayton (2007) argue that many competition horses never reach their full potential due to inappropriate training or management practices that result in injury or horse-rider conflict.

Despite the emphasis on the relationship between horse and rider in much of the literature described in this chapter, questions of horse welfare in sport raise pertinent questions about the status of the horse-rider relationship. It cannot be overlooked that equestrian athletes are naturally often implicated in cases of horse abuse, with cases of riders knowingly participating in practices harmful to their horses bringing into question romanticised notions of a bond or partnership. Evidence of corruption and intimidation, even death threats toward officials trying to prevent unethical practices such as "soring" from occurring (cf. Sneed, 2014) have been documented, suggesting that rather than being custodians of their horse's welfare, some competitors may represent a direct threat to horse welfare. Frazier (2000) describes how "the best intentioned people may have their judgement clouded by ignorance, prizes, or ego" (p. 1259), citing competition stress as an explanation for unethical treatment that would not occur in other contexts. Although it is concerning that competition pressure may be used to explain horse abuse, it follows from Frazier's argument that competitive riding represents a particular threat to horse welfare

and the horse-rider relationship, particularly, one may argue, where the stakes are the highest and the sporting challenges the greatest.

An assumption inherent in many sporting domains is that the safety of horses lies in the hands of a "knowledgeable and caring rider" (Frazier, 2000, p. 1259), not with veterinarians or other parties who have far fewer opportunities to assess the horse's state. While public opinion plays an important role in determining how elite sport proceeds (Campbell, 2013b) it must be riders themselves who insist the most vehemently of all that the horse's welfare be upheld (Heuschmann, 2011). Yet how much agency do riders have to ensure the welfare of their horses is upheld? And should riders also be held responsible when something goes wrong? A spate of accidents in the mid-nineties caused major re-assessments to take place in the sport of eventing, as riders, spectators, course designers, and horse owners alike reeled as five event riders died over as many months. It is, as van Gilder Cooke (2012) points out, more difficult to garner a sense of the injuries horses incur via sporting practice, with the FEI retaining no formal records of this.

Equine deaths during competition are identifiable, however, and many of those competing at the upper echelons of equestrian sport have experienced a fall or similar incident during competition which resulted in the death of their mount (Funnell, 2005; Fox-Pitt, 2009; Todd, 1998, 2012; van Gilder Cooke, 2012). Mark Todd (2012) describes his anguish and self-blame at the death of one of his horses during a cross-country round, with similar emotions expressed by other riders in the same circumstances (cf. Fox-Pitt, 2009; Funnell, 2005). Todd also notes how organisers and course officials must be held responsible for the conditions under which a horse is placed in competition, stating, "No rider who is in a position to win a medal, or even to complete for their team, is going to canter around an Olympic Games" (p. 83). The pressure on elite riders to perform well may be particularly apparent during high-level competitions, with Fox-Pitt (2009) stating of his Olympic mount who struggled with dehydration and climatic changes in the lead-up to the Olympics:

> If this had been a normal competition in the UK I would not have even put him on the lorry. But this was the Olympics and the only option was to get him right and hope that he did in time (p. 286).

Despite closer attention to cross-country course obstacles and other dynamics of the sport of eventing in recent years, another deadly period in the sports history recently took

place, with twelve event riders dying in a year and a half during 2007-2008 (van Gilder Cooke, 2012).

Dressage, too, has come under considerable fire with respect to some of its modern training methods, which appear to have potentially detrimental effects on horses (Heuschmann, 2007). As Bryant (2008) notes, concern within dressage circles is that riders are increasingly rewarded for competing horses that move in extravagant, unnatural ways, bringing into question what qualifies as an exceptional performance. Research has indicated that some of the head and neck positions commonly associated with an ideal dressage performance may place horses at an increased risk of injury if maintained for lengthy periods of time (Rhodin et al., 2009), while one particularly controversial dressage training practice is that of rollkur or hyperflexion of the neck (Bryant, 2008; McLean & McGreevy, 2010b), a practice aimed at increasing the suppleness of the horse. This practice has been associated with the use of "aggressive force" (FEI, 2010, para 1) and deemed biomechanically unnatural by a number of veterinarians (cf. Heuschmann, 2007). Although the FEI (2010) has formally sanctioned the practice of rollkur, concern abounds about its continued practice (Bryant, 2012). Lashley, Nauwelaerts, Vernooij, Back, and Clayton (2014) found that despite FEI regulations on head position remaining consistent, a review of judging in elite dressage from 1992 to 2008 revealed a shift in judging, such that higher marks were awarded to horses ridden in a hyperflexed position, a finding also identified by König von Borstel, Pasing, and Gauly (2011).

The sport of endurance has also recently come under fire with respect to horse welfare concerns. Belgian's national coach, and member of the FEI endurance committee, Pierre Arnould, spoke out recently to the media regarding horse welfare concerns relating to stress fractures, doping practices, multiple horse deaths, and sporting scandals relating to cheating, corruption, and conflicts of interest (Cuckson, 2013). The FEI allegedly responded to these allegations, calling them unsubstantiated and damaging (cf. Samuel, 2013) and announced that it would introduce a number of initiatives (FEI, 2014d) designed to sustain horse welfare. Yet Arnould is not alone in his concerns; prior to the 2014 World Equestrian Games, Marc van den Dungen resigned as chair of the Royal Dutch Equestrian Federation Endurance Technical Commission, stating "I do not wish to be associated with an organisation that pays lip service to horse welfare by putting success at the World Equestrian Games at the top of its agenda, instead of the welfare of the horse" (as cited by Goddard, 2014, para 4). Given that research suggests welfare, safety, and behavioural issues in equestrian sports are in many cases a by-product of mishandling or the result of a

breakdown in the communication between horse and rider (Visser et al., 2008), these welfare concerns must be considered in relation to the status of the horse-rider relationship in modern sport.

3.5 Summary

Elite equestrian sport represents an intriguing context in which to study the dynamics of the horse-rider relationship. On one hand, if the relationship between horse and rider is central to competitive success, as many have argued, then we would expect elite dyads to represent a relational ideal to which lower-level riders may aspire. We would also expect elite riders to perhaps be the most adept of any category of rider in developing strong relationships with horses. On the other hand, arguably nowhere is the relationship between horse and rider under greater pressure than in the elite context. As Rudolph (2009, p. 54) poignantly states, "when one considers the nature of sports, two opposing thoughts may come to mind: hobbies and multi-million dollar professional contracts." The discussion of the horse-rider relationship in sport leads us to Chapter Four, where the specific phenomena to be explored in this study will be outlined with respect to symbolic interactionism.

Chapter 4 Symbolic Interactionism and Interspecies Relationships

4.1 Introduction

All researchers bring to their work assumptions about what can be known about the world (Crotty, 1998). Some assumptions are personal and non-scientific; some are borne of exposure to relevant scientific notions of the world and reality. The role and influence of pre-existing ideas, personal and scientific, has long been contested in grounded theory research. Given the two previous chapters of this dissertation have dealt with extant literature germane to the topic of the dissertation, the reader may rightly question the role this literature played in the formulation of the study findings. As the preceding chapters suggest, this research was informed by existing empirical and theoretical findings outlined in Chapters Two and Three, as well as by my own ideas and experiences as an equestrian, and exposure to lay equestrian literature. These findings, theories, and ideas were treated as provisional and problematic, however, rather than as accepted and therefore invisible, while certain extant aspects of the literature became sensitizing concepts that informed the development of interview questions.

Symbolic interactionism (SI) was utilized in the process of conducting this research as an appropriate lens through which to examine the relationship between horse and rider in equestrian sports and a complementary framework through which to conduct social constructionist grounded theory. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes constructing meaning socially and through acts of interpretation grounded in social life (Bartlett & Payne, 1997) and thus also aligned with the topic of the current study. This chapter will provide an overview of symbolic interactionism with particular reference to interspecies interaction, a contentious aspect of traditional symbolic interactionism, and will outline how symbolic interactionism fits with a social constructionist grounded theory methodology. The relevance of symbolic interactionism for the current study will then be discussed. The chapter will conclude with an outline of the purpose, aims, and research questions of the current study.

4.2 Symbolic Interactionism: An Overview

Taking a theoretically driven approach to the questions that are asked and the problems that are addressed in the course of conducting research, can, as Charmaz (2014) suggests, lead to encountering otherwise unforeseen analytic territory. A theoretical

perspective provides "an angle on reality" (p. 4) that naturally draws certain phenomena into our consciousness and makes other aspects of reality less visible (Charon, 2010). It also infers a certain set of assumptions, philosophies, and propositions that cumulatively communicate meaningful and useful information about how the world can be perceived (Bernard, 2002; Crotty, 1998; LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993). Inasmuch as a theoretical perspective serves as a mental filter, bringing certain phenomena into focus and desensitizing us to other stimuli, perspectives are fundamental to life, as well as to scientific research.

It is important to differentiate between the role of scientific theories and theoretical perspectives, particularly as the two terms are often incorrectly used interchangeably (Stryker, 2008) and their etymology reflects some common ground. The term "theory" is of Greek origin and means "to speculate," defined by Coulson, Fowler and Little (1973, p. 2281) as "a scheme or system of ideas or statements held as an explanation or account of a group of facts or phenomena." By contrast, the term "perspective" comes from the Medieval Latin term, *perspectiva* (sc. *ars*), and from the verb perspicere; with *per* meaning "through" and *specere,* "to look" (Coulson et al., 1973). Both terms, broadly speaking, refer to ways of seeing and thinking about the world, however, a perspective provides a lens through which phenomena may be examined (Charmaz, 2014), but does not act as an explanatory, predictive model of generalizable statements regarding the relationships between a set of variables (Stryker, 2008; White & McBurney, 2013). Stryker (2008) suggests that a perspective is useful in generating theory, but does not in itself constitute a set of testable claims because it does not speak to the connections between concepts or variables but rather outlines concepts that may be central in understanding certain phenomena.

Symbolic interactionism provides an interpretive lens through which to consider human behaviour and social life (Charon, 2010) and intersects with social psychology via their mutual focus on the ways in which individuals influence each other. Charon (2010, p. 23) writes that in social psychology, "the focus is neither society *nor* the person, but on the present situation one is in" [italics added], while Blumer (1962, p. 180) defines symbolic interaction as "the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings." From a symbolic interactionist position, subjective meaning and action are paramount (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). How individuals utilise the meanings available to them, and the implications this has for their actions, can offer important insights into not

just socially derived meaning but also the individual, and here social psychology and sociology may converge.

What is critical, and perhaps distinctive about the symbolic interactionist approach, is that social interaction is seen as more than just a way of expressing humanity; social interaction is critical in shaping humanity (Blumer, 1969a). When we examine our social interactions, subjective meanings come to life, and take their form through language (Mead, 1934). Symbolic interactionism recognises that human meanings are dynamic and shifting; change is not a mystery to be explained but an ever-present dimension of meaning making. Symbolic interactionism centralises society, reality, and the self, and argues that all three entities are constructed through dynamic social interaction (Charmaz, 2014). How individuals understand their environments, others, and themselves therefore becomes critical to understanding human action and the meanings that are associated with it and arise out of it (Reynolds, 2003). Structural aspects of social life exist, but change is more central to human behaviour and social life than is stability (Rose, 1962). The following sections will outline key theoretical aspects of symbolic interactionism, followed by a brief exegesis of some key criticisms that have been levelled at symbolic interactionism. Building on the work of Sanders (1990, 1993, 2003), Irvine (2004a), Fox (2006) and Alger and Alger (1997), I challenge the symbolic interactionist emphasis on intellectualized, linguistic modes of communication as the hallmark of meaningful communication and relationships, and argue that human-animal relationships constitute meaningful social exchanges.

4.2.1 Philosophical Origins

Symbolic interactionism has practical roots originating in pragmatism, a postmodern perspective described by Plummer (2000, p. 194) as “the harbinger of postmodern social theory.” From a pragmatist perspective, “meanings emerge through practical actions to solve problems,” notes Charmaz (2014, p. 263), while truth is plural, and “appraised in terms of its consequences” (Plummer, 2000, p. 197). Pragmatism considers worthy of attention that which is concrete and specific, not abstract generalities. Understanding and action cannot be separated; what people do, what leads them to these actions, and what happens as a result must be examined to understand social life and the individuals that create it. Pragmatist philosophies are imbued with both practicality and optimism; individuals are seen as capable of responding to their environments, they are not simply instinctual, pre-programmed, passive receptors of what goes on around them

(Hewitt & Shulman, 2011; Schneider, 2011). Symbolic interactionism does not confine its interests to just behaviour, however; action, as it was understood by Mead (1934), included both physical and mental responses, while the unobservable was of critical interest, in contrast to traditional behaviourist approaches to social psychology (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Charon, 2010; Schneider, 2011).

4.2.2 Meaning, Mind and Self in Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism emphasises individuality and agency; human beings are perceived as capable of defining, using, and changing their environment according to their understandings of it (Charon, 2010). Blumer (1969b) proposed that meaning is created and modified via an interpretive series of actions or encounters between an individual and the object toward which the individual acts, with reality constructed through (a) social interaction, and (b) the use of symbols to communicate meaning (Fassinger, 2005). Communicating inwardly with the self and outwardly with others gives shape to perceptions and actions (Charmaz, 2014), and in this sense we are all lay scientists, attempting to understand the meanings of others and respond accordingly. Wittgenstein (1958) and Schwalbe (1983) stress that action and language are inextricably linked; without language, mutual understanding is heavily restricted, perhaps even impossible, and without understanding, the possibilities for dual action, which Wittgenstein suggests is the only form of action, are severely limited. Such propositions contain interesting implications for the communicative possibilities available to those who may speak the same language, but on a superficial level, those who speak different languages, and for interspecies communication.

The mind is central to symbolic interactionism as a platform by which the individual may interact with and develop the self; it is a playground in which one may internalize and grapple with symbols, allowing the mind to create internal dialogue that results in what Milliken and Schreiber (2012, p. 688) call “minded behaviour.” The question of self is also of critical importance to symbolic interactionism, in particular, how do we form a view of the self and what impact does our social environment have on the self? Mead (1934) proposed that the self is given meaning in the same way that meaning is assigned to others and to objects, referring to each of an individual’s self-definitions as a “me,” with some more salient than others (Solomon, 1983). A different perspective was provided by Cooley (1902), who emphasized the imaginative qualities of the human mind

in his notion of the "looking glass self," in which one comes to define the self through imagining how one is perceived by others.

As a social object, the self may be acted towards by the individual in the same way that an individual can act towards their environment, allowing an individual to become the object of their own actions (Blumer, 1962). How others define us also contributes to our sense of selfhood, as William James (1910, p. 179) states:

> Properly speaking, *a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognise him* and carry an image of him in their mind. But as the individuals who carry images fall naturally into classes, we may practically say that he has as many different social selves as there are distinct *groups* of persons about whose opinion he cares [italics original].

Talking to the self with symbols may be seen as euphemistic within symbolic interactionism for thinking (Charon, 2010), with Schneider (2011) proposing that thought processes provide an arena in which aspects of the self can be considered, re-evaluated, and contextualised. Along these lines, Rose (1962) proposed that thinking was a mental substitute for trial and error learning, in which one took the role of the self and considered oneself encountering different possibilities. The attention paid by symbolic interactionism to meaning and interpretation may be overstated, however, with Snow (2001), suggesting that this may be a by-product of the almost mundane embedded nature of many symbols and meanings in culture and sub-culture, which by default negates a good degree of the interpretive work that an individual may face on a daily basis. Further to this, he points out that much interpretive work may not involve deciphering new experiences, but determining what existing meaning is best applied to a given situation, while the social environment is a part of the formation and stream of change that characterises the self. These conceptions add depth to Blumer's original statements and raise new questions of how meaning and symbols gain structure and become "taken-for-granted" (Snow, 2001, p. 372).

4.2.3 Language, Symbolic Communication, and (Social) Objects

Language, symbolic interactionists argue (cf. Mead, 1934), allows us to consider the self as a social object, because through language we are able to categorize and describe ourselves symbolically. Language also brings stability to the social and cultural world (Schwalbe, 1983) as meaning and experience, borne of shared symbol use, create a source

of continuity. These ideas of self and the importance of symbolic communication have been posited as the most important aspects of symbolic interactionism (Schwalbe, 1983). Of great interest to symbolic interactionism, Schwalbe (1983) states, "is what language can do, or more precisely, what a speaker can do with it" (p. 292). Language confers to humanity the capacity to act with creativity and respond in unanticipated ways to "reality," mobilising an individual's ability to engage in relationships and create social meaning. Reality is intrinsically social in nature; symbolic interactionism argues that as we act and interact within the world, we construct socially derived means of understanding. Meaning is not, as Blumer (1969a, p. 68) says, "intrinsic to the object." The language we use to describe social objects affects how we think about them and helps to determine the purpose we ascribe to them, while how we act toward any given social object plays an important role in determining what it means to us (Blumer, 1969a; Charmaz, 2014).

Symbolic communication allows us to transcend our immediate environment, when the past and the future are made symbolic social objects, we are able to examine and manipulate them and, importantly, inhabit them, as well as the present, concurrently (Hertzler, 1965). What counts as a social object? Virtually anything, Charon (2010) argues, listing people about whom we form definitions, including the self, as well as ideas and perspectives, emotions, and physical objects, both natural (i.e. a tree) and artificial (i.e. a table). Animals, he points out, also have the potential to be social objects. Whatever is used to make sense of our environment has the potential to be a social object. Moreover, an object changes according to how we view it, and how we view it depends on what our use for it is, and the goals that we need to meet (Charon, 2010). Naming allows us to go beyond the physical world and enter a world where terms central to human existence and grounded in symbolism, such as "love" and "honour," take their abstract meaning (Hewitt & Shulman, 2011). As Charmaz (2014) highlights, naming an object sets boundaries around it and the relationship one has with it, but this is not a static process, with words given meaning through ongoing social interaction (Wittgenstein, 1958).

Symbols may be defined as any abstract means of representing or understanding social objects that enables social communication and understanding (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012), including but not limited to "language, gestures, text, pictures, rites, dress" (Schneider, 2011, p. 251). Symbols have the capacity to transform and expand human consciousness, opening windows to sophisticated thought and acts of self-definition (Hewitt & Shulman, 2011). They create possibilities for active interpretation and emerge out of active interpretation, simultaneously, while just as objects are not ascribed innate

meaning, so too symbols gain meaning via ongoing intersubjective social construction (Schneider, 2011). Symbols may have an entirely arbitrary relationship with that which they represent, for instance, a thumbs-up signal to indicate all is well (Hewitt & Shulman, 2011), while the meaning of a symbol may be determined by its purpose (i.e. a chair provides somewhere to sit) and by the learned emotional response attached to the symbol's meaning (i.e. relief at being able to rest) (Rose, 1962). Much of the meaning of symbols arises out of socialization, with shared meanings creating a sense of consistency around interpretations of reality and an environment that is more predictable and harmonious than one in which symbolic meanings are highly divergent (Solomon, 1983).

4.2.4 Taking the Role of the Other

In addition to creating shared meanings, symbolic interaction revolves around the ability to take the perspective of another (Solomon, 1983), with some theorists (cf. Charon, 2010) contending that social action and interaction hinge entirely on this ability. Symbolic interactionism has traditionally viewed this phenomenon as enabling individuals to act in accord with each other, creating social harmony (Gallant & Kleinman, 1983), with role-taking a distinctly purposeful activity (Stryker, 1962). Social roles do not exist in isolation, for instance, the father role is meaningless in the absence of the child (Turner, 1962, p. 23). Even in highly structured societies, social roles are always changing, characterised by some degree of uncertainty, and as these roles evolve, so too must societal expectations. Examples include the changing institution of the modern family (Stryker, 1962) and the ways in which changing social and gender roles have created uncertainty around expectations in modern romantic relationships (Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003).

One interesting dimension of role-taking is to consider how a multiplicity of roles, both of the self and as perceived in the other, are navigated, and how this impacts upon selfhood and our perceptions of others. Turner (1962) states that whilst stability usually underlies the roles we inhabit and the roles we attribute to others, it is possible for conflict to emerge between roles and when two roles conflict, future action becomes more difficult to predict. Can the individual act from two roles simultaneously, or does a single role naturally dominate the other? Or does a third role under which other roles are subsumed develop? In the context of the current study, this dimension of symbolic interactionism directed my attention to the possible roles equestrian athletes enact in interaction with their

horses, and the roles that they attribute to their horses. Do multiple roles exist and if so, are they in conflict or harmony, or some mixture of both, with each other?

Can we take the role of the other without using symbols? No, some argue (cf. Charon, 2010); inhabiting the perspective of another is to inhabit another's symbolic framework, while Stryker (1962) argues that taking the role of the other requires "a common universe of discourse" (p. 42), though not necessarily a strictly linguistic one. Taking the role of the other is also seen within interactionism as dependent on having a notion of self because the self is part of the situation that is imagined when we attempt to understand how another individual defines their immediate reality. This ability, like many other aspects of symbolic interactionism, has traditionally been considered unique to humans, with animals lacking the theory of mind required to take another's viewpoint (Charon, 2010). If the animal-human divide is as wide as some theorists argue, it follows that an animal's emotional and mental experience of the world must also be significantly limited, with empathy, for instance, widely considered a by-product of attempting to view the world through another's eyes (Rose, 1962).

4.2.5 Criticisms, Limitations, and New Developments in Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism has been accused of being irrelevant, out-of-date, too general, unscientific and lacking in vitality (Mullins, 1973), gender blind (Smith, 1987), oblivious to biological forces (Pinker, 2003) and too conservative (Denzin, 1997) while its value as a scientific perspective has been questioned (Fine, 1993; Plummer, 2000). It has been called redundant and a theoretical failure, overly individualistic and subjective, relativist, and conflicted in its ideas about the self, with some suggesting it neglects the role of emotion (Collins, 2004) and the unconscious mind (Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds, 1975; Wrong, 1962). Others have argued that it does not account for "power, structure, economics, and history" (Plummer, 2000, p. 203), though a number of these criticisms have been directed at the perspective from a sociological, rather than a social psychology, viewpoint (Stryker, 1987).

Language is seen as critical to the development of self in symbolic interactionism; however, this raises difficult questions around human development and interspecies relationships. If selfhood depends on one's capacity for language, what does this mean for infants and animals that either do not possess linguistic abilities as we know them, or have not yet mastered their linguistic facility? Furthermore, what of the vast range of

experiences, emotions, and tacit meanings that exist beneath conscious awareness, or are very difficult to pin down or enunciate (Gardiner, 2000)? Freudian theorists, for instance, would question the place of meanings that exist below the level of conscious awareness and are not fully recognised by the self (Prochaska & Norcross, 2007), let alone expressed in social interaction. How do experiences that are not seemingly expressed or developed in interaction, much less interaction of a symbolic nature, come to have meaning?

Some middle ground-theories have been posited in which nascent experience and knowledge of self prior to language mastery is conceived as possible. For instance, Schwalbe (1983) suggests that the emerging self may develop hand-in-hand with the capacity for symbol use, a notion that accommodates Meadian theory, but only in part; language is still seen as foremost to the act of knowing and communicating. Middle-ground theories allow for some flexibility in considering the importance of symbolic communication, but they do not negate the restrictive emphasis on spoken language that has characterised symbolic interactionism, nor do they excuse its failure to analyse the properties of sophisticated non-linguistic communication (Sanders, 1990). The overemphasis on spoken language in symbolic interactionism has had two important consequences: it has furthered the dualism between species and between mind and body, and it has limited symbolic interactionism's theoretical capacity to explain human, animal, and human-animal communication and relationships (Brandt, 2005). These issues will be explored in the following section of this chapter with regard to human-animal communication and relationships.

The role of macro, structural forces in symbolic interactionist theory has also been widely contested. A common criticism of symbolic interactionism is that by focusing so closely on micro-level analysis, it denies the power of social structures (Kuhn, 1964; Meltzer et al., 1975) to shape the context(s) in which individuals interact, leading symbolic interactionists to overstate the agency individuals possess in creating meaning. In defending symbolic interactionism against this criticism, it is necessary to consider Blumer and Mead's perspectives of the outside world separately. As highlighted by Puddephatt (2009), Blumer (1969a, p. 22) contradicts himself when he states that meaning arises out of, and only out of, human interaction, whilst at the same time suggesting that the empirical world can "talk back." In essence, Blumer accords some agency to social structures, whilst simultaneously denying meaning to anything but social interaction. If micro-level social interaction alone shapes meaning, it follows that meaning has the potential to vary and fluctuate without constraint. Yet as Blumer (1969a, p. 110) himself

notes, the "potentialities for divergent direction" rarely reach fruition, instead with only a few exceptions, "human group life is not noticeably instable or irregular," as might be expected from a micro perspective such as symbolic interactionism. A purely micro, processual understanding of meaning generation is too narrow to fully explain meaning generation in the social world. Blumer's view is problematic because it leaves no room for inanimate, environmental structures to shape human action, except as they are defined by human beings. As Puddephatt (2009) points out, to deny the relevance of anything but language-centric human interaction in the construction of meaning borders on nonsensical.

Mead, on the other hand, took the view that both agency and structure are implicit in emergence (Chang, 2004); societal structures have power and so too does the human agent (Stryker, 2008). Mead's views thus encompass a more inclusive understanding of meaning construction, recognising the limits to an individual's control over the world and acknowledging the circumstances under which social reality is lived out (Fine, 1993). While symbolic interactionism emphasizes individual freedom and agency (cf. Charon, 2010), its focus is on the generation of collective, co-constructed meaning, raising the question of how much meaning can be truly generated by an individual agent? Amidst the freedom and agency, or as Stryker (2008, p. 16) puts it, "dignity" accorded to human beings in the symbolic interactionist perspective, there are limits, or as Snow (2001, p. 368) calls it, "degrees of constraint." Cultural, structural, and social forces all impinge upon notions of individual agency, yet even in the case of Mead, who demonstrated greater cognisance of these factors than Blumer, symbolic interactionist ideas have focused on micro-level meaning-generation (Chang, 2004).

It is important not to overstate symbolic interactionism's focus on micro-level social processes, for as Chang (2004) notes, Mead's intent was to examine social action and process, but this does not imply that he saw structural forces as irrelevant. What much commentary on symbolic interactionism has failed to highlight is that rather than viewing biological, structural, and cultural variables as extraneous to human behaviour, symbolic interactionism views these as constraining factors that influence, but do not control human action and meaning-making (Snow, 2001). As Benzies and Allen (2001) note, the individual freedoms and nondeterministic stance of symbolic interactionism must be tempered by attention to the role of social and cultural norms. Puddephatt (2009) suggests that Mead knew this (but Blumer did not) and considered these forces the structural underpinnings of micro-level acts of meaning-making. It may be easy to lose sight of the influence of these macro-level factors, however, with Snow (2001, p. 369) reinforcing that

"neither individual or society nor self or other are ontologically prior but exist only in relation to each other."

The place of structure and process in symbolic interactionist theoretical conceptions of the self have been hotly contested, with the Chicago interactionists arguing for a constant renegotiating of self, and the Iowa school promoting notions of a fixed, stable self, modified in moderate, incremental ways through social interaction (Schneider, 2011). Both perspectives are oversimplifications (Schneider, 2011); if the self is constantly changing, past experience is of limited value, while a structure-heavy view of the self undermines the concepts of agency and freedom that inform the symbolic interactionist perspective. Furthermore, it may be possible to incorporate both structure and process into a single overarching conceptual framework of symbolic interactionism, if neither view is taken to an extreme. A single-minded emphasis on change and process would render past experience near impossible to navigate and understand, and the present difficult to comprehend (Schwalbe, 1983). The self changes within a broader stable context (Schwalbe, 1983); new meanings can arise out of the past precisely because stability and change characterise the self.

Meaning, like the present and the self, is emergent, understood and experienced in context to the past and the future, always in flux (Mead, 1932). Furthermore, symbolic interactionism does not necessarily prescribe to a radical form of relativism in which it is argued that no reality exists and social structures are imagined (Charon, 2010; Charmaz, 2014). Symbolic interactionism assumes that physical reality exists, but that we respond to a version of reality mediated through symbols (Solomon, 1983). Social structures also exist, but it is the way in which we interact with them that determines what they mean (Charmaz, 2014). Whether the self is viewed as a structure or a process has important implications for how human life is examined in scientific research. As Schneider (2011) notes, a process-oriented self is less readily measured and examined empirically, while a structure-oriented self may be measured in more concrete ways, and arguably may not reflect the self as it exists in the social world. How symbolic interactionism views the self holds implications for whether the perspective is able to theoretically combine concerns around micro-experience and action and macro-level analysis of structure and culture (Schneider, 2011). In studying micro-processes, Strauss (1978) argues, we implicitly examine the organizational, macro structures that constrain meaning (Nichols, 1991) and interaction (Hall, 1987) and therefore play an integral role in the construction of both meaning and interaction (Fine, 1993).

Amidst contentions around what symbolic interactionism is and is not, or should be and is not, it is worth recalling that from a symbolic interactionist perspective, meanings change because they are created socially (Plummer, 2000). We must expect and accept that interpretations of symbolic interactionism are subject to revision and will change, while the meaning of the perspective lies at least in part with the individual(s) who define its meaning in interaction with others. It is also important to remember that the context in which symbolic interactionism was founded represented a period of rapid social change (Plummer, 2000) and Mead's symbolic interactionist ideas represented a challenge to Herbert Spencer's evolutionary perspective in which humans had little agency and merely responded to what the environment presented to them. These considerations do not negate valid concerns about symbolic interactionism's limitations; they do, however, allow us to approach its limitations in context.

Symbolic interactionism has been diluted and permeated by different ideas about the role of structure, ideology, and micro- and macro-concerns, while scientists from outside sociology and social psychology have contributed to its development as a perspective (Fine, 1993). With these permutations, new terrain has been conceptualized, and thus exists the potential to extend symbolic interactionism by incorporating other intellectually productive ideas into its framework (Fine, 1993), helping to avoid what Stryker (2008, p. 21) calls the "intellectual chaos" that results when unrelated specialized theories are produced en masse. Furthermore, as Plummer (2000) points out, this theoretical expansion has rendered criticisms such as that symbolic interactionism neglects emotion, no longer valid. The traditional split between the micro and the macro has also been reconsidered along with the development of the intermediate concept of mesostructure, defined by Maines (1982) as the intermingling of societal forces and human action, leading to an emphasis on the interconnections between different levels of human life and scientific analysis. A more significant failing in context to the current study, is symbolic interactionism's neglect of non-verbal communication and human-animal relationships and it is these issues that will now be addressed.

4.3 Symbolic Interactionism and Human-Animal Interaction

The failure of symbolic interactionism to consider human-animal relationships within its theoretical rubric has limited the perspective's capacity to create knowledge about a broad spectrum of intimate, long-term social relationships (Sanders, 2003).

Symbolic interactionism has always been humanistic; as Rose (1962) notes, unlike most of its theoretical predecessors, which centred and tested their ideas on animals and then extrapolated the findings to humans. Symbolic interactionism from its very beginnings has oriented toward the assumedly distinctive characteristics of the human being. With its emphasis on selfhood and mind, symbolic interactionism has traditionally privileged humanness and all that is associated with it and has consequently failed to recognise how the tenets of interactionism may in fact transcend species and different types of relationships. Mead (1934, p. 182-183) states:

> We…tend to endow our domestic animals with personality, but as we get insight into their conditions we see there is no place for this sort of importation. They do not have the mechanism for it - language. We put personalities into the animals, but they do not belong to them and ultimately we realize that those animals have no rights. We are at liberty to cut off their lives…He has not lost anything because the future does not exist for the animal… We talk to them and in our talking to them we act as if they had the sort of inner world that we have.

For Mead, two states of consciousness existed, one belonging to those who could speak about their thoughts and one belonging to those for whom the ability to speak about thought was absent and, so too, the ability to think in symbolic, "human" complexity (Irvine, 2004a). The mind contains intelligence, knowledge, and culture; the body on the other hand, is functional, but not meaningful (Brandt, 2005). Science has traditionally devalued human-animal relationships (Kruger & Serpell, 2006), with those who experience close relationships with animals seen as somehow unable to form healthy human relationships (Walsh, 2009) and unable to be objective or recognise their erroneous thinking about animals. Yet this view inadvertently devalues the construction of meaning as it occurs in daily interaction between humans and animals, instead prioritising scientific constructions of reality that value objectivity and authority over authentic personal experience. Anthropomorphism is conceived here as a risk to be guarded against, a sentimental aberration attributable to emotionality and other weaknesses amongst those who fail to be rational about animals.

Yet our perceptions of "the other" are always, inevitably, a construction. Weber (1947) astutely observes that it is misguided to accept that we can and do share feelings and understandings with those of our own species, but are unable to do the same with other

species. The subjective experiences of another are never easy to decipher (Goffman, 1959); estimations are a necessity (Sanders, 1993) regardless of whether species boundaries are crossed. Furthermore, and as a reminder of the pragmatist origins of symbolic interactionism, Bernstein (1990) suggests that theories of social life are best considered according to their usefulness, rather than their supposed accuracy. If the understanding formed by those in direct interaction with animals is ignored, it seems appropriate to contend that science severs itself from valuable interpretations of social life. Science may continue to debate the issue of anthropomorphism, but it should not follow from this that only what science deems "correct" understandings of animals should be examined. The potential value of exploring "anthropomorphic" attitudes in developing an understanding of human-animal relationships has yet to be fully explored in scientific theory.

A fundamental, albeit contentious assertion of symbolic interactionism is that symbol use defines meaningful social interaction, is a unique quality of humans (Blumer, 1962; Mead, 1934) and alone makes a sophisticated world possible (Benzies & Allen, 2001). With the human ability for language, Mead argued, humans were afforded self-consciousness, and with this, a measure of control over the self and the environment that does not characterise the worlds of other species (Hewitt & Shulman, 2011). Symbolic interactionism has also placed great value on the functionality of language in allowing us to take the role of the other, yet this notion precludes the meaning of interspecies communication and relationships, not just in terms of their possible meaning, but in their capacity to represent a legitimate form of interpersonal interaction and interspecies relationship. Consider the following from Schwalbe (1983, p. 292):

> Meaning is shared…when the response an utterance evokes in the hearer is functionally identical to the response it simultaneously evokes in the speaker. By implication, successful communication…can only occur between organisms possessing the ability to take the role of the other, that is, between organisms possessing selves.

Verbal communication is not just seen by traditional models of symbolic interactionism as unique to humans, it is also seen as superior because of its directness as a communicative agent (Rose, 1962). Semiotics, it was argued, allows human beings to create history, culture, and advanced forms of communication and meaning, and therein animals and people are divided (Plummer, 2000). The "extraordinary capacities" of animals are noteworthy, Saleebey (2001, p. xi) notes, but are "nothing approaching that of

humans" (p. xi). It is the symbol that shifts our reality from a physical realm to that of action and understanding. Animals may act, but only in passive ways, perceived by symbolic interactionism as "mindless, emotionless, self-less, reacting rather than acting, apprehending rather than comprehending, and existing only in the immediate situation" (Sanders, 2003, p. 406).

Anthropocentrism lies at the heart of Mead's traditional symbolic interactionist ideas. Yet while Mead was blatant about the diminished moral status of animals, Charon (2010) cautions us against diminishing the rights and status of animals as a consequence of the perceived difference between the instinctive animal and the intentional, thinking human, yet it is hard to understand how the rights and status of animals could remain undiminished in light of the symbolic interactionist position on animal minds. As Sanders (2003) notes, Mead uses animals as a counterpoint to human virtues, and this view has pervaded symbolic interactionism despite the fact that compelling explanations of non-human animal behaviour that accord animals with consciousness and the capacity for intentional action exist, and are as imbued in explanatory power as more traditional theories that assume instinct or genetics underlies animal behaviour (cf. Griffin, 1976; 1984; 1992).

Excluding material and animal worlds from societal and psychological life and from the domain of meaningful interaction has defined and limited symbolic interactionism, distorting the picture of social reality it can capture (Puddephatt, 2009). In reducing the only valuable form of communication to linguistic, symbolic exchange, all other forms of communication are positioned as either unsuccessful or illegitimate, yet as Latour (2004) argues, how can science identify universal meanings by focusing solely on meaning as it is rendered and understood by human beings? And what of modes of communication that sit outside the intellectually revered status quo? There are also political and philosophical implications attached to the "linguicentric Cartesian assumption" (Sanders, 2003, p. 406) underlining symbolic interactionism. Haraway (2003) suggests that underneath the separation of humans from animals and from technology lies a derisive, politically motivated and unsubstantiated human supremacism in which maintaining the status quo is more valuable than examining what, if any, logical distinction separates species from each other and even from technology. Ecological theorists have also denounced this division of species as an anthropocentric attempt to distance the presumed higher order intellect of human beings from the environment and from nature (Gardiner,

1998). We must consider all aspects of life: animals, plants, technology, and human beings as agents of meaning borne of action; not just linguistic acts are meaningful (Latour, 2004).

To ignore non-human agents and non-verbal communicative devices is to perpetuate an "anthropocentric orthodoxy" (Sanders, 2003, p. 406) that posits the inferiority of animals, and privileges the mental self over the disembodied physical self. "Social science, in this dualistic thinking so characteristic of Western thought," writes Freund (1988, p. 839), "assigns mind priority over body, and severs it from its embodied form." In Mead's (1934) Cartesian separation of body and mind, the body is denied the reflexivity accorded to the self (Myers, 2003), with Mead (1934) arguing that a change in physical form (i.e. the loss of a body part) essentially has no impact upon the self. An artefact of categorising communicative acts as minded/verbal and instinctual/physical is that scientific analysis of the physical becomes separated from analysis of the psychological, the social, and the mental to such an extent that the questions scientists ask of social phenomena cannot fully permeate the subject matter (Freund, 1988).

Research on relationships requires an awareness of physicality; as Brandt (2005) argues with respect to her research on human-horse communication, the body, in all its unique complexities, may enable symbolic interaction, as well as profound experiences of inter-subjectivity between individuals. An incomplete understanding of relationships may develop when sensory aspects of a relationship are either dismissed or not even recognised as valid forms of knowledge or knowing (Smart, 2011). This has implications for horse-rider relationships where knowledge may be embodied and therefore treated as illegitimate by scientific communities (Smart, 2011). As Beer (2005) points out, human beings may be "language-rich" but they are, in comparison to many animal species, "sense-poor" (p. 313) and thus interspecies interaction may invoke a powerful melding of sensory and cognitive processes.

Rather than dichotomising humans and animals, thinking about the differences between species as "a matter of degree rather than kind" (Sanders & Arluke, 1993, p. 384) may reflect a more appropriate approach. As Freund (1988) notes, physical experience is in large part moderated by mental experience and the interplay between the two must be acknowledged and incorporated into scientific thinking. We must broaden our understanding of what can constitute meaningful communicative acts and interaction, not just because of the speciesism that results from failing to do so but because extant interactionist notions of meaningful communication do not even thoroughly explain human meaning-making activities, let alone those activities that occur between species. Not all

meanings are learnt, experienced, expressed consciously, or developed via self-reflection or in a rational or linguistically oriented fashion (Crossley, 1996). Many rules and habits of social life are learnt through unconscious socialization and a great deal of how we understand the world is formed before the opportunity to reflect is presented (Puddephatt, 2009), with Turner's (2000) work suggesting that instinctual responses often precede our definitions of what they mean. Furthermore, Hewitt and Shulman (2011) argue that shared definitions of a situation may be incongruent across actors, but this does not necessarily result in a disruption to meaningful exchange. Some parts of social life must be understood as separate from the conscious acts of meaning-making that dominate symbolic interactionism. Individuals possess biological and social instincts; they are not tabula rasa until such time as "linguistically enabled socialization" (Puddephatt, 2009, p. 102) begins.

Given the centrality of human-animal relationships in the 21st century, and the emotional intensity that often characterises these relationships (cf. Sanders, 2003), the importance of investigating them should not be underestimated. Developing forms of human-animal interaction suggests a growing need to understand social processes that extend beyond the boundaries between species (Myers, 2003). It is possible to incorporate many notions of symbolic interactionism into research on animals if we are prepared to consider mechanisms other than language through which a concept of self may emerge (Alger & Alger, 1997). Research conducted by Sanders (2003) and others, discussed in Chapter Two, suggests that understanding between humans and animals may occur through emotional, sustained social exchanges that have implications for human and animal identities, and the co-identities forged by the human-animal dyad. If we acknowledge the human body as an important component of understanding how meaning is constructed, and we acknowledge that the human body is constructed socially amidst historical and institutional imperatives and structures (Freund, 1988), we must also attend to how animal bodies are constructed and how bodily communication occurs between species.

The current study aimed to explicate the meanings attached to the horse-rider relationship in sport, with meaning approached not as an attribute of an individual but as a product of a relationship, of dual participation in a common system of meaning (Gergen, 1994). It is important to note, however, that the focus of the current study rests on the perceptions, experiences, and narratives of human equestrian athletes, experienced and expressed from an unavoidably human standpoint. The perceptions and experiences of the horse may be approached through such narratives in important, but also in provisional and limited ways.

4.4 Symbolic Interactionism and Grounded Theory: A Theory-Methods Package?

We have continually a different past.
Every generation re-writes its history.
Novelty reaches out in both directions from each present experience.
- George Herbet Mead, 1936, p. 291

Grounded theory as a method has been widely used and diffused (Charmaz, 2014), in part because of its apparent epistemological flexibility, however, not all ways of using grounded theory adhere to a connection between the method and any given theoretical perspective. Despite the long-standing interest of both Glaser and Strauss in symbolic interactionism, the relationship between grounded theory and symbolic interactionism has been heavily debated. Glaser (2005) has been quick to argue for theoretical separation between grounded theory and symbolic interactionism, while others have suggested that symbolic interactionism influences grounded theory, but is not fundamental to it (Robson, 2002). Contrary to this, Charmaz (2014) notes that grounded theory has been infused with both the logic and assumptions of symbolic interaction by Anselm Strauss, who was a graduate student of Herbert Blumer and along with Barney Glaser, a member of the Social Interactionist Society (Bunch, 2004). Utilising grounded theory as a methodology embedded in a perspective on the world may provide stability to grounded theory research that is otherwise lacking when grounded theory is simply used as a data analysis technique (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012).

Epistemological and theoretical roots provide stability and depth to qualitative research methodologies. Grounding the methodology of the current study in symbolic interactionism opened doorways to unanticipated ways of seeing and thinking that have the potential to advance the conceptual depth of the work that has been conducted. Both symbolic interactionism and grounded theory emphasize the study of process, the construction of theory out of empirical observation, and the role of human agency in shaping reality (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Continuity also exists between perspective and methodology in their dual emphasis on uncovering process and action (Charmaz, 2014), with a drive to seek out explanations for action that remain as close as possible to the perspectives of those whose actions we observe emerging from both method and perspective (Charon, 2010). The emphasis is therefore naturally on methodologies and data

collection techniques, such as interviewing, that open doors to the ways in which individuals define their situations.

Symbolic interactionism also infuses research practice with a sense of the value of human life, emergent in ethically-oriented, respectful and sensitive behaviour toward research participants (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Charmaz, 2008b). Moreover, as Charmaz (2014) notes, symbolic interactionism encourages us to consider not just the language of our participants, but our own language, and perhaps more controversially, encourages us to be aware of the role of emotion, in both the self and in the participant, and to be reflexive in ways that are consistent with social constructionist research. The strength of using symbolic interactionism and grounded theory together lies in the coherence between them; together the theory and method provide analytic momentum that enhances but does not prescribe meaning to empirical data. However, the non-prescriptive nature of a theoretical perspective is critical. Whilst I consider symbolic interactionism a relevant theoretical lens through which to understand the topic under consideration, I took note of Glaser's (2005) warnings about focusing exclusively on a single theoretical perspective when developing grounded theory data codes and categories. Like the literature outlined in Chapter Two and Three, symbolic interactionism was treated in the current study as a sensitizing force, relevant where it earned its way into the data analysis. During the research process, I attempted to remain theoretically sensitive to alternate ways of thinking (Charmaz, 2008b) and to the limitations of symbolic interactionism as a sensitizing theoretical perspective.

4.5 Symbolic Interactionism in Context to the Current Study

Symbolic interactionism provided a means of amplifying and contextualising the world as it appeared in my participants' data (Alasuutari, 1996), while applying symbolic interactionism flexibly and reflexively led to fresh insights on my own taken-for-granted ways of viewing reality. Action is a part of research as it is a part of every social act and interaction (Benzies & Allen, 2001), and thus the relationship between participant and researcher inevitably lies at the heart of the research and the creation of meaning. Symbolic interactionism also encouraged me to think deeply about animal minds and human-animal relationships. Questions about what experience means to an individual, and how and under what conditions this experience and the meanings attached to it change, were provoked by symbolic interactionism. I sought to capture, however imperfectly, the social interaction that brings meaning to corporate human and animal action. Symbolic interactionism

encouraged me to study social life by entering the world of those I sought to understand, as much as may be possible (Hewitt & Shulman, 2011). In-depth interviewing presumes that participants are able to enunciate their experiences, beliefs, and feelings with some degree of insight; this aligned with the symbolic interactionist assumption "that people can and do think about their lives and actions" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 9).

I was interested in the way in which participants described and positioned horses, and their relationships with them. What meaning does the horse have for a competitive, elite-level rider? And how does this meaning change through social interaction? Does it become problematic and if so, when and why? Given elite riders interact with horses on a regular, day-to-day, routine basis, it is likely that as Charmaz (2014) states, collective identity and action leads to a lessened consciousness of action(s) and the meanings that are attached to them, until, as Snow (2001) points out, they become problematic and habitual action no longer fits with the meaning formerly associated with it. I was also interested in the seemingly universal discourses that pervade competitive equestrian sport and how these discourses facilitate collective action and thought amongst competitive equestrians. If we presume Cooley's (1902) looking glass self is a relevant way of thinking about horse-rider relationships, it follows that we should consider how riders imagine their horses see them, and how this imagined view of the self affects how riders feel toward themselves and, importantly, toward the source of the reflection. While any imagined looking glass self is always a filtered approximation of the "other's" view, interpretations represent powerful sources of social information.

Symbolic interactionism asked me to consider temporality and context. Elite riders usually begin relating to horses many years before they become elite or even competitive riders, and thus they may experience a temporally guided sequence of relationships with horses that may become more or less complex over time as a rider's status changes. A notable feature of equestrian sports is the lengthy time period in which one may ride competitively, even at the highest levels of the sport (Kiger, 2012). This means that riders may interact with horses over significant periods of time and that their self-image may change as new meanings and forms of action encourage new realisations (Gecas, 1982). For a young teenager, a horse may symbolize freedom and friendship; yet as the context in which the relationship is embedded changes over time, the meanings symbolized and signified by the animal may also change.

The present is a product of the past, but it also contains novel dimensions that separate it from the past (Mead, 1932), while recollections of the past are shaped by the

present (Charon, 2010). This is not to imply that the past or the future can be reduced to or equated with the present, simply that reality is grounded in the present and so too is the past and the future (Miller, 1943). Such notions have implications for how retrospective accounts of past action, emotions, and experiences as divulged in in-depth interviews should be considered. As the self evolves, experiences change in their meaning, and these changed meanings may lead to a changed reality, a shift, either subtle or dramatic, in how the world and significant others are experienced. Temporality also involves considering the future and as future-minded beings, our imaginations permit us to consider actions yet unlived (Charon, 2010).

The context in which research takes place is also paramount, with participant accounts reflecting the oft unstated status quo of any given research encounter. Researchers bring to the research context their own personal experiences, appearance, agenda, and demeanour, while complex situational power/status differences between the researcher and participant may have a profound impact on what is disclosed and how it is disclosed (Charmaz, 2014). The centrality of language to in-depth interviewing must also be considered. In the process of transforming verbal, nuanced accounts of human life into written words, some meaning is inevitably lost (Charon, 2010). Reducing participant accounts is a necessary evil of scientific research, however, a compelling picture of participants' intentions, feelings, point-of-view, life context, and actions may still be captured.

4.6 Study Purpose, Research Questions and Aims

The purpose of the current study was to generate the beginnings of a substantive theory of the relationship between horse and rider in elite sports. I sought to create a theoretical narrative that explored the ways in which this relationship is developed, framed, and understood by riders who participate in elite equestrian sport. In keeping with the emergent nature of qualitative research and the objectives of grounded theory, the specific research questions of this study evolved over the course of the study (Creswell, 2009). The relationship between horse and rider in elite sport was considered worthy of exploration given the relative paucity of scientific, psychological theory addressing this unique interspecies relationship. Interspecies relationships warrant examination particularly when interaction takes place amidst the risk and uncertainty (Billings et al., 2012), with risk and uncertainty both features of the equestrian sporting environment. The project was informed

by the symbolic interactionist prerogative to attend to joint action in trying to understand the actions of horse and rider and the relationship between them (Gallant & Kleinman, 1983).

The status of horses in sporting culture has long been contested, but in an age where amateur (cf. McClure, Carithers, Gross, & Murray, 2005) and elite horses (cf. Henderson, 2007) increasingly demonstrate physical and mental signs of stress (cf. Art & Lekeux, 2005; Christensen, Beekmans, van Dalum, & van Dierendonck, 2014; von Borstel et al., 2009), and sporting deaths of both horse and rider are not uncommon (Ingemarson et al., 1989; van Gilder Cooke, 2012; Williams & Ashby, 1995), the relationship between humans and animals in sport demands examination. Despite formal condemnation of welfare-jeopardizing practices such as hyperflexion by the governing body of equestrian sport (FEI, 2009), ethically questionable practices nonetheless continue to pervade equestrian sport (cf. McGreevy et al., 2010), with evidence suggesting that these practices are in certain instances rewarded rather than punished by equestrian judges (cf. Hawson, McLean, & McGreevy, 2010; Lashley et al., 2014).

An increasingly pragmatic approach appears to be pervading elite equestrian sport, with the commodification of competition horses bringing into question the status of the horse-rider relationship in 21st century equestrian sport (Dashper, 2014). Ethically dubious training practices that threaten horse welfare also raise questions about the role of the relationship between horse and rider in elite sport and the future of equestrian sport (Campbell, 2013b; Francione, 2010). Writing about the recent deaths of several high profile eventing horses, van Gilder Cooke (2012) notes that these fatalities are considered tragic by riders, but do not appear to be a significant deterrent to sporting participation, while questions of horse agency are increasingly coming under consideration. With respect to the sport of eventing, Olympic Gold Medalist and U.S. Eventing Association President, David O'Connor states, "I really do think that the horses choose to do this….they might not have chosen to start doing it, but they really can choose not to do it at any time" (van Gilder Cooke, 2012, para 10).

Examining riders' attitudes toward horses and their relationships with them may be instrumental in shedding light on the status of equestrian sports, with the hope that equestrian organisational sporting bodies may use the knowledge developed in this study to develop policies aimed at minimising horse welfare issues and wastage. If equestrian sports are to evolve in an ethically sustainable fashion, the value and place of the relationship between horse and rider must be examined and the connection between the

horse-rider relationship and sporting outcomes must be scrutinized. This is important at all levels of competitive equestrian sport, however, elite athletes exist in an professional, economic context that arguably places a greater degree of pressure on the horse-rider relationship than at lower levels of the sport, while elite riders represent the public face of equestrian sports in their international visibility, meaning they may influence other equestrian cohorts in important ways.

In an attempt to explore the relationship between horse and rider and construct an analytic framework of this relationship, the following research questions were asked of the data:

- What characterises and defines the relationship between horse and rider in an elite sporting context?
- What are the implications of the horse-rider relationship for the competitiveness of horse-rider dyads?
- What do elite riders' descriptions of their relationships with horses suggest about the ways in which riders construct and understand these relationships?

This study also aimed to explicate the meanings attached to the language used by equestrian athletes to talk about horses and their relationships with them. Thus the following questions were developed via attention to sensitizing concepts identified in relevant scientific literature and as directed by symbolic interactionism:

- How do elite riders negotiate the power-dynamics that exist in discourses around human-animal relations?
- What does the term "partnership" denote about horse-rider sporting interaction?

I sought to identify the underlying implications of referring to horse-rider "partnerships" rather than simply discussing the relationship between horse and rider. Was this simply a question of semantics or does the term "partner" carry connotations with particular meaning for equestrian dyads? I also sought to examine the status of horses in elite sport, with particular attention to the connection between horse-rider relationships and performance outcomes. Finally, I sought to develop a theoretical framework of this substantive area because as Domahidy (2003, p. 76) states, "theory is powerful…it shapes beliefs that in turn shape social action" and thus grounded theory was drawn upon as a valuable methodological approach through which to examine horse-rider relationships.

4.7 Summary

This is the fourth chapter of this dissertation in which pre-existing ideas and theoretical conceptions have been considered, and like the research findings, ideas, and theories outlined in earlier chapters, symbolic interactionism represents one tentative way of understanding the phenomena under consideration. I have argued that symbolic interactionism opens a window on the interpretive meanings attached to social action and interaction, leads us to consider how language brings action to life, and encourages us to recognise the centrality of process in understanding social phenomena (Charmaz, 2014). This chapter has also outlined how symbolic interactionism may be extended to consider human-animal relationships and how it may successfully complement a social constructionist grounded theory methodology.

Chapter 5 Methodology

5.1 Introduction

The current study explored the relationship between horse and rider in equestrian sport using an interpretive, constructionist qualitative research methodology. This chapter will outline the epistemological position of the study, as this provided a contextual frame for understanding social reality and conducting this research. Social constructionist grounded theory will then be outlined, followed by an explication of the data collection strategies. The demographic features of the participant sample will then be described, followed by the data analyses procedures and a discussion of reflexivity. The chapter will conclude with an argument for the methodological rigour and quality of the study and an explication of relevant ethical considerations.

5.2 Qualitative Research

We had the experience but missed the meaning.
And approach to the meaning restores the experience
In a different form

T. S. Eliot (1943, in "The Dry Salvages," Four Quartets)

My initial thinking was that a small phase of qualitative research would take place at the beginning of what would be a predominantly quantitative research project. Qualitative research, I anticipated, would facilitate an exploration of horse-rider relationships that would inform subsequent quantitative research outlined in my original research proposal. In its richness and depth, the qualitative data that resulted from this early phase of the project illuminated the meaning participants accorded to their relationships with horses and challenged my ideas about how to investigate this phenomenon. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) note that qualitative research is situated, naturalistic, and interpretive, primarily concerned with making the world visible and this was apparent in the data I had collected. After some deliberation and discussion with my supervisors, I made a decision to focus solely on the collection and analysis of qualitative data in order to do justice to the complexities of the horse-rider relationship expressed therein (Morse, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005).

Qualitative research stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between researcher and researched, and the situational constraints that shape the value-laden inquiry taking place (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). It represented an incisive way of examining the relational topography of this dissertation. Qualitative research allows for an analysis of meaning as it is embedded in context and time by attempting to capture the fluidity of meaning-making and the action and changes that result from it (Charmaz, 2014). In aiming to understand the events and experiences that define horse-rider relationships, and how these may become linked to each other (Charmaz, 2014), qualitative research provided a fitting means of conceptualising horse-rider relationships. Drawing on criteria set out by Daly (1992), Allen and Walker (2000) reflect on the private, intense, and collective consciousness of personal relationships and suggest that qualitative research is well suited to investigating the form(s), processes, and meanings of these relationships. The extent to which equestrian dyadic relationships can be penetrated through research is perhaps inevitably limited, however, by an inability to access the perspective of the horse in the same manner that the perspective of the rider may be accessed. Nonetheless, careful, tentative analyses of the horse-rider relationship from the rider's perspective represents a valuable means of examining interspecies relationships, preferable to avoiding scientific analyses of interspecies altogether because of these limitations. Qualitative research offered a window into the perspectives, needs, and values of participants and an opportunity to engage with the language used by them to describe horse-rider relationships.

Qualitative research gave participants the capacity to select aspects of their experience that they wished to emphasize and provided them with an avenue to describe these experiences in an in-depth, personal manner (Barbour, 2008). Relationships of any kind can be difficult to describe; they constitute the kind of phenomena Willig (2007, p. 209) alludes to when she says, "There are dimensions of experience which people find difficult to put into words and which seem to involve their entire being." This may be particularly relevant when the relationship is primarily experienced through non-verbal avenues, as is the case for horse-rider dyads (Brandt, 2005). Relationships contain transformative, personal, and pragmatic elements, all of which inform our dialogues around them, including the experiencing of complex emotions that are often difficult to enunciate. Describing relationships with horses may have been challenging for participants, but as Willig (2008) notes, the more we know about a phenomenon, the more detail we perceive when we observe it and therefore participants were considered well-equipped to talk about horses and relationships with them. Rather than viewing

participants' extensive personal experiences of horse-rider relationships as a threat to the veracity of the research process, participants' subjective, real-world understandings of the phenomenon under examination were considered a strength of the work.

5.2.1 A Social Constructionist Epistemology

Social enquiry inevitably involves making claims and forming assumptions, implicit and explicit, around what is social reality (Blaikie, 1993). As such, it is imperative that the assumptions embedded in a researcher's methodological approach are made explicit (King & Horrocks, 2010). This work has drawn on social constructionism because of its focus on individual meaning-making and the shared generation of meaning that occurs in the social world, and in the process of conducting scientific research (Crotty, 1998), though social constructivism has also been drawn upon in delineating the epistemological approach of the work. As Charmaz (2014) notes, social constructionism has evolved to such an extent that the overlap between the two epistemological approaches makes the interchangeable use of terms appropriate (Lynch, 1998). I have attempted to remain true to the language used by those social constructionist/constructivist theorists upon whose work I have drawn, and thus both terms have been invoked in this work, particularly with respect to Charmaz (2014), who refers specifically to constructivism, though she suggests that her epistemological position is consistent with modern understandings of constructionism.

Social constructionism is an epistemological theory of knowledge in which meaning is understood as the product of co-created, shared realities, developed through language, and inherently relativist (Crotty, 1998). The social constructionist position of this dissertation does not espouse the view that no reality exists at all, however, and nor do I consider that all representations reflect 'reality' equally well (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Social constructionism has been invoked as a means of acknowledging that participants' understandings do not reflect an objective, singular reality sought out and obtained through systematic, objective enquiry, but are socially constructed through time, culture, and context. In keeping with this, I was cognizant that "interpretations construct objects" (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 21) and that words have meaning only within "the context of ongoing relationships" (Gergen, 1994, p. 49).

Whilst the phenomenon under examination in the current study concerns multiple forms of communication, including bodily communication (Brandt, 2005), a primary

means through which meaning was conveyed in the research setting was through verbal communication and thus language was considered particularly relevant to the construction of multiple, shifting realities in this work (Willig, 2012). Language informs our experiences of the world and is also a product of our social experiences. Whilst reading articles that describe training sessions between Australian horse-rider dyads and international horse trainers, it is not uncommon for European trainers to describe their struggle to find an English word that appropriately reflects the meaning of the German word they would usually use to describe a desired movement or action between horse and rider. Moore (2006) notes that when terms (i.e. Losgelassenheit, Anlehnung, and Schwung) from the German dressage training scale are translated into English (Relaxation, Contact, and Impulsion, respectively), they lose meaning and become vague. English speaking riders may equate "Losgelassenheit" with "calmness," but the German word carries meaning beyond that which is encapsulated in its English counterpart (Ritter, 2006). To some extent, therefore, it may be argued that European riders with access to a greater variety of more meaningful terms to describe aspects of horse-rider interaction have a different experience and understanding of what may be taking place in horse-rider interaction. The language we use to understand the world and ourselves, is as Gergen (1994, p. 49) puts it, a "social artefact[s], products of historically and culturally situated interchanges among people" and thus language informs our ways of thinking about the world, though culture and thought processes also impact upon and shape language in important ways.

From a social constructionist perspective, to talk about phenomena is to position it within a discursive framework (Willig, 2007). The narratives participants' created around themselves, their horses, and their relationships with horses reveal their worldviews and the ways in which these world-views are lived. Likewise, when researchers label abstract ideas from participants' descriptions, a constitutive act has occurred (Willig, 2007) and so the researchers' worldview is illuminated via a merging or co-construction between the researcher and the researched. A social constructionist perspective suggests subjective meanings are a pivotal aspect of human understanding, with meaning negotiated across social, cultural, and historical contexts, and evolving landscapes of time, place and mind. In this subjectivity, multiple meanings may readily co-exist, creating a cacophony of complex ideas and interpretations of human experience (Creswell, 2009).

Adopting a social constructionist perspective has implications for the selection of the research methodology and for the interpretation of the data that follows. As Charmaz

(2008a) notes, constructionist ways of thinking must be applied not just to the studied phenomenon, but to the research practices employed to study it. Research itself is a social construction and must be scrutinized as such, hence the emphasis on reflexivity in this dissertation. The historic, positivist traditions of prediction and control (White & McBurney, 2013) are abandoned in order to construct meaning borne of participants' worldviews, cast and embedded in the language used to enunciate action and meaning as it is lived.

5.2.2 Social Constructionist Grounded Theory

Science is a conversation between rigor and imagination.

Andrew Abbott (2004, p. 3)

The social constructionist version of grounded theory that this research drew upon aims at theory construction in its invocation of methodological tools that allow analyses of data to take place in an interactive and innovative manner (Charmaz, 2008a). "Grounded theory" may denote a research method and/or a product of research aimed at theory construction, while as a method it has been applied broadly and regularly cited, but less regularly conducted in adherence with its methodological properties (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). Built on emergent logic, grounded theory espouses explicit, but flexible analytic tools that enable the construction of surprising and dynamic findings (Charmaz, 2008c). Grounded theory is, according to Reed (2010, p. 33) "an argument…about the plurality of contexts of explanation," and these contexts are inevitably defined and differentiated through social action and interaction. Social constructionist grounded theory requires tolerance of ambiguity (Suddaby, 2006), a preparedness to think creatively and critically (Thornberg, 2012), and a willingness to locate theory contextually (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). It provides a crucial link between asking "what" and "how" questions, enabling researchers to dig deeper and address the "why" questions that often elude other forms of qualitative research (Charmaz, 2012).

The primary goal of grounded theory is to create a plausible and useful theory of a certain phenomenon, grounded in data, furthered by comparisons between data. Grounded theory encourages tentative interpretations as the researcher moves between an inductive focus on the participants' raw data, to the formation of abductive, provisional hypotheses (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008) that are further examined using sensitizing concepts and

constant comparative methods (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory research questions commonly centre on processes, experiences, structure, and cognitions; however, from a social constructivist perspective, and in keeping with symbolic interactionism, processes are considered particularly important (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory thus tends to focus on social processes and their consequences, rather than shedding light on an individual's psyche; though these two ways of examining human conduct are in some respects intrinsically intertwined and may both be explicated through grounded theory research.

5.2.2.1 Theory Construction in Qualitative Research

What is theory? Neuman (2011) defines it as abstractions that organise and connect ideas about the world in systematic ways, while Timmermans and Tavory (2012, p. 182) refer to theory construction as "an attempt to make sense of the world through generalisations of empirical phenomena." Theory building in essence draws on the data, but also on the researcher's past experiences and extant theory (Langley, 1999) and, I would contend, the researcher's worldview. Grounded theory offers tools and strategies that may shift qualitative research away from description, however, developing theory requires more than just rigorous application of technical strategies. As Langley (1999, p. 691) states, "no analysis strategy will produce theory without an uncodifiable creative leap, however small" while the interpretive processes of grounded theory also depend on a researcher's sensitivity to unspoken and subtle meanings within the data (Suddaby, 2006).

The construction of a substantive theory of horse-rider relationships in elite sport was a key focus of the current study. Substantive theories present arguments and attempt to answer questions about a specific phenomenon of interest, with contextual details drawn upon in the act of constructing a theory (Charmaz, 2014). The specificity of substantive theories allows them to deeply conceptualise the meaning and resonance of the theoretical conceptions that have been drawn, but only within a certain context. Such contextualised analysis inevitably limits the capacity of substantive theories to provide insights and explanations that have generic value. In contrast to the focus on a specific area of interest or concern that defines substantive theories, formal theories tend to take a more abstract, general form, and may account for a broader analysis of concepts relevant to a number of substantive domains (i.e. the concept of identity) rather than just one substantive area of study (Charmaz, 2014). The substantive theory generated by this research may lead to the

development of concepts that have more general resonance within sporting and social relationship contexts, and may also have applications within a number of theoretical and disciplinary frameworks.

Constructing a substantive theory in the context of the current study meant considering the status and meaning of horse-rider relationships within the context of elite sports. I sought to develop a set of interrelated, abstract, analytic categories that might lead to a theoretical framework by which horse-rider relationships in elite sport may be understood. This framework began with the construction of specific codes that enabled me to synthesize what was happening in the data in an analytic but relatively singular fashion. From this process, a broader set of categories that enabled me to meaningfully link patterns in the data codes were developed. Not only did these categories allow me to link important concepts identified within key data codes, they also served to foster an analytic and conceptual analysis of the data, which as Charmaz (2014) notes, is often missing from qualitative data analysis.

The theoretical framework generated from this process was "grounded" in data and in the acts of interpretation that accompany the processes of developing theory. An interpretive theoretical stance drew me to consider the subjectivity of the situational conditions under which theorising took place. This was somewhat antithetical to traditional ways of theorising, in which an attempt is typically made to establish explanations that may be generalised across time, location, and context (Charmaz, 2014). Rather than limiting the reach of scientific theories, however, reflexivity in theory development may allow theories to be extended with sensitivity to the structural and contextual features of the world in which theories are formed and negotiated.

5.2.2.2 Abductive Logic of Grounded Theory

The underlying logic of grounded theory represents perhaps the most divisive aspect of the methodology. Traditionally, grounded theory was seen as developing without the influence of pre-existing theoretical preoccupations, a position still held by Glaser (2000), who prioritised theory "emergence" and saw theory development as the outcome of applying fundamental grounded theory procedures, not as a construction of the researcher. Glaser and Strauss (1967) both espoused an emergent, inductive position in their early work, though Strauss went on to adopt the use of explicit coding paradigms aimed at verification (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) that Glaser (1992a) felt forced data

into preconceived, deductive categories and contradicted the basic inductive tenets of grounded theory. Rather than seeing technical procedures as an affront to "emergence," Strauss and Corbin (1990) saw a place for active engagement with existing literature in grounded theory, arguing that this had the potential to stimulate ideas and questions, and enrich the researcher's conceptions as long as creativity was not forsaken in the process.

In her version of social constructivist grounded theory, Charmaz (2014) retains the inductive emphasis of Glaser, but shifts away from both Glaser (2002b) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) by deemphasising the emergence of theory, focusing instead on the ways in which the outcomes of grounded theory are socially constructed and embracing inductive and abductive logic. Abduction is seen by Charmaz (2014) as a way of dealing with imaginative discoveries and novel connections between ideas that lie at the heart of grounded theory research, but induction is still given a place in the research process. This acknowledges the ways in which prior knowledge inevitably and unavoidably shapes observations and resulting insights (Hanson, 1965; Kelle, 1995; 2007a; 2007b); as well as acknowledging that "seeing is already a 'theory-laden' undertaking" (Thornberg, 2012, p. 246). Charmaz takes a less extreme view than other grounded theorists such as Timmermans and Tavory (2012), who argue that pure induction is a myth and that an inductive approach to theory development limits the scope of grounded theory to such an extent that scepticism emerges around the capacity for grounded theory to truly generate theory at all.

Pure induction may not only be unattainable, it is also not necessarily desirable. Theory development does not occur in isolation; it requires knowledge integration and synthesis (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010). Prior knowledge must always impinge in some way on "novel" research findings, and being informed theoretically provides the researcher with alternative ways of approaching the work (Alasuutari, 1996). The current study takes an inductive-abductive approach to grounded theory in which contextualised, creative, novel theoretical insights are sought through abductive logic, with an attempt made to bracket prior knowledge as per an inductive position. Abduction has, in keeping with its pragmatist origins, been defined as a means of developing useful explanations (Richardson & Kramer, 2006) and as an interpretive act, brought about through the combination of things not traditionally associated with each other, rendering fresh insights (Reichertz, 2007). This definition incorporates Charmaz's (2014) understanding of abduction as "a type of reasoning that begins…but does not end with induction," with abduction defined as the process of creating inductive categories and making deductions about them (p. 341). It

also takes into account Timmermans and Tavory's (2012) definition of abduction as "an inferential creative process of producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence" (p. 170).

5.2.2.3 Theoretical Sampling

Of all the processes that define grounded theory research, constant comparison and theoretical sampling have been positioned as the most fundamental, perhaps in part because both strategies conflict with positivist ideas of scientific research practice (Suddaby, 2006). Separating data collection and analysis is the hallmark of traditional scientific research and constant comparison is antithetical to this separation. Similarly, in theoretical sampling, data collection proceeds in accordance with data interpretation and coding, rather than in pursuit of an a priori hypothesis (Suddaby, 2006). Both theoretical sampling and constant comparative processes reflect the iterative heart of grounded theory (Suddaby, 2006), with non-linear sampling, data collection, and data analysis processes occurring simultaneously and interactively, with evaluations made both across and within participant accounts via constant comparison (Jones et al., 2006).

Theoretical sampling is one of the most complex, frequently confused aspects of grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2014; Coyne, 1997), perhaps in part because of the vague language that has been used to describe qualitative sampling strategies (Coyne, 1997). Theoretical sampling traditionally involves collecting, analysing, and coding data before deciding what data to collect next and from whom (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is defined and driven by emergent theory and a desire for theoretical saturation of categories (Charmaz, 2014). Furthering the confusion around theoretical sampling, however, is the overlap between theoretical and purposive sampling. Theoretical sampling involves selecting a purposeful sample in the early stages of research, but purposive sampling is not synonymous with theoretical sampling, rather theoretical sampling may be considered a variation of purposive sampling in which the needs of the developing theory determine further sampling activities (Coyne, 1997).

Charmaz (2014) notes that theoretical sampling may take multiple forms; as well as interviewing and reinterviewing participants, researchers may consult extant documents, engage in observational work, and participate in new social worlds as a way of developing, grounding, and refining theory. In keeping with the flexibility of constructionist grounded theory, Charmaz (2012) advises researchers to use strategies that work for them whilst

remaining cognizant of the claims they make, with the need to express restraint around theoretical claims made where theoretical sampling is limited or has not taken place. Hood (2007), however, argues that theoretical sampling is a non-negotiable component of conducting grounded theory. Yet despite the importance imparted to theoretical sampling by many grounded theorists, relatively few researchers appear to use it when executing grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2014). Why? One reason may be the logistical difficulties in accessing a participant sample on repeated occasions without knowing in advance and being able to inform relevant institutional parties, what categories may emerge, and what future interviews may address. The sheer volume of data that may result, as well as other pragmatic constraints, may also constrain a researcher's efforts to conduct subsequent interviews or engage in other forms of theoretical sampling.

My own application of theoretical sampling in this research requires close consideration, as it is pivotal to how the findings of the current study should be evaluated and considered theoretically. By some researcher's accounts, the current study invokes aspects of theoretical sampling, and these will be detailed, however, I do not claim to have engaged in theoretical sampling to its full extent, and therefore consider the findings of this study to represent a provisional and tentative theoretical framework of horse-rider relationships in equestrian sport. In the following paragraphs, the research practices with which I engaged that invoke theoretical sampling are outlined, as well as those that may be considered aspects of the iterative processes of grounded theory research.

My early data analysis led to the addition of new interview questions where appropriate, which allowed me to elaborate on early categories and ideas emerging from the data, in keeping with the point Strauss and Corbin (1990) make about certain interview questions readily appearing less salient than others. This was critical, as failing to revise interview guides or employ them flexibly may result in reaching "saturation" quickly and superficially (Charmaz, 2014). I also chose in the early stages of research to focus my attention on elite riders, as upon examination of the data I had collected, I observed that certain early categories, such as "juggling personal and professional dimensions of the horse-rider relationship" were of particular relevance and provocation to this cohort and warranted further exploration. Having said this, it is important to note that theoretical sampling first and foremost is about sampling to develop a specific code or category, it is not so much about who is sampled, which is more reflective of the iterative processes of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). Iterations to my sampling processes were guided by writing memorandums (memos), and referring to my initial codes, as well as some focused

codes. This is not entirely in keeping with Charmaz's (2006) advice to develop focused codes before engaging in theoretical sampling, however, Charmaz (2014) also notes that theoretical sampling can be used in both the early and later stages of research as long as tentative analytic categories are being investigated. Memo-writing allowed me to specifically record gaps in my early analysis and note what to seek in the pursuit of saturating theoretical categories.

Several situational constraints impinged on my ability to conduct further theoretical sampling. Obtaining repeat access to an international cohort of equestrian athletes was not easily achieved. I had gained access to a large chunk of the initial participant sample by attending a major international equestrian competition, a rare, time-limited opportunity to access a large number of elite riders in a single setting. Although being able to access so many participants at a single location was enormously beneficial, this was also somewhat of a one-off opportunity and like Draucker, Martsolf, Ross, and Rusk (2007), to delay interviews during this period in order to give myself time to develop focused codes from the data I had collected would have meant losing access to a significant proportion of potential participants who had expressed interest in participating in the study. I had previously conducted a number of interviews in Australia and these interviews had been subjected to an early analysis but the interviews that followed were conducted within a narrow time-frame, leaving little time to analyse data between interview sessions. This, as well as other logistical constraints, such as the time involved in transcribing and analysing further data, precluded me from repeating interviews with these (or other new) participants, at a later date.

In an attempt to address these limitations, I turned to other theoretical sampling strategies. I followed K. Charmaz's advice (personal communication, September 19, 2012) and set about checking my categories with less extensive data than what I had previously collected. Fassinger (2005) states that alternatives to re-interviewing and conducting new interviews include returning to the current data set to select further incidents through which nascent theory is examined, as well as taking into consideration other research documents such as participant feedback, documents, and extant literature. In instances where further interviewing is not possible, these alternatives offer a preliminary means by which theoretical sampling and subsequent theory development may be pursued. Fassinger (2005) also notes that collecting large amounts of diverse and comprehensive data can in part offset the need for re-entering the field to gather further data.

Theoretical sampling in the current study involved reading articles written by elite riders and horse trainers on horse-rider relationships, digesting autobiographies and biographies of elite riders, watching footage of horse and rider working together competitively and in training, and analysing interviews conducted by third parties (such as television presenters at the London Olympic Games and FEI commentators at Normandy World Equestrian Games) with elite riders and considering how the data contained in these materials related to my developing categories. These sources provided further information which raised new questions, addressed and extended my own analytic conceptions and provided a deeper understanding of the movement and variation within my categories. These strategies presented little opportunity for direct checking of my categories, as they relied on close-ended data from secondary sources, but they did allow me to develop my categories further and pursue different ways of thinking about these categories.

I do not consider these processes a replacement for conducting further targeted interviews, and I do not claim to have engaged in theoretical sampling to its full extent. Hood (2007) makes clear that to achieve theory development in its true form, one must produce a final report in which all variations, and the conditions associated with these variations, are thoroughly outlined. I do not claim to have penetrated the full range and variation of my categories, or to have fully explicated all the relationships between these categories. They require further analyses and theoretical sampling in order to achieve the status of a cogent, fully-refined theory. Having noted this, I acknowledge the strength and value of the work that has been conducted, and I am conscious of the risks associated with minimising the value and potential of this work. Indeed, K. Charmaz (personal communication, September 19, 2012) states that much high quality grounded theory research has been based on thin historical data, for which there are naturally few avenues for further checking and thus the findings of this study must be accorded merit despite their provisional nature.

5.2.2.4 Theoretical Sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity may be defined as the insight a researcher has into the studied world, their awareness of the nuances and actions depicted in the data, and their ability to decipher meaning from data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Theoretical sensitivity implicates both discovery and the ability of the researcher to evoke their knowledge of the substantive area in meaningful ways. A researcher must move beyond not just sensitizing

concepts and what they know about the substantive area, but beyond descriptive thinking to engage in an explanatory, theoretically-oriented way of thinking (Bowen, 2006). My approach to theoretical sensitivity aligns with Timmermans and Tavory's (2012, p. 173) contention that "unanticipated and surprising observations are strategic in the sense that they depend on a theoretically sensitized observer who recognises their potential relevance," however, I do not concur with their view that "extensive familiarity" with existing theories is ideal. While I do not claim theoretical innocence, I strove to engage in inductive and abductive analysis in an attempt to create a space in which novel ideas could emerge (Charmaz, 2014).

A literature review was a requirement of my PhD candidature; nonetheless, a conscious attempt was made to ensure a significant period of time marked the end of the formal literature review and the beginning of data collection and analysis. In noting this, I do not attempt to claim that this period of time absolved me of the constraints or the advantages that result from possessing knowledge about one's topic area, or that it is ever possible to unlearn literature or erase one's professional position and its impact. Whatever distance I may have attempted to place between myself and extant literature, these sources undoubtedly served to sensitize me to possibilities and ideas within the data. Furthermore, as Bruce (2007) makes clear, research cannot begin without pre-emptive objectives. I found conversations with colleagues, as well as my supervisors, and equestrians with whom I regularly come into contact highly stimulating, provoking thoughts, ideas, contradictions, and tensions between my ideas in ways that advanced the analytic depth of my work. "Pushing the data against existing theories" (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 179) allowed me to examine where existing theory and my own early theoretical ideas did and did not account for what was happening in the data, furthering my analytic conceptions.

Through constant comparative analysis, I attempted to remain sensitized to influences outside the research data. The intersection of existing theory and new data led to what Timmermans and Tavory (2012, p. 179) term "anomalies…both empirical and theoretical." By delving into these anomalies, tentative categories were forged through inductive conceptualisation, leading to an iterative process of abduction; movement between new and existing ideas. I feel this approach allowed me to harness what Thornberg (2012, p. 247-248) refers to as "the analytic power of the constant interplay between induction (in which he or she is never tabula rasa) and abduction." While the raw data was my primary source of ideas and inspiration, drawing upon a diverse set of existing

ideas and theoretical concepts was also important. In treating pre-existing ideas and past research as fallible and tentative, I engaged in what Henwood and Pigeon (2003, p. 138) call "theoretical agnosticism." Where pieces of the existing puzzle added explanatory power to my data, I used them, where they did not, new concepts were developed.

My tactics here align with Thornberg's (2012) informed approach to grounded theory, in which both the research process and research product are grounded inductively in the research data, but not in the absence of existing ideas, or separate from the influence of ideological, personal, and professional preconceptions. The logic of abduction pervaded this research from beginning to end. Pre-existing ideas, and knowledge of one's substantive area, whether personal or professional, are not threats to grounded theory if theoretical innovation, a direct product of abduction, is the ultimate research goal (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Furthermore, reflexive practices, such as writing personal memos, bring to the surface of the research process influences beyond the data that have shaped theory construction. Rather than denying these influences, making them explicit gives the researcher greater control over them and their impact upon research. Finally, grounded theory is well known for its specific methodological guidelines (Charmaz, 2014); the explicitness of these guidelines, though flexibly employed here, were instrumental in ensuring my analysis remained open-ended and focused on participants' accounts.

5.2.2.5 The Literature Review in Grounded Theory

Following from debates about theoretical sensitivity and the inductive nature of grounded theory, the literature review represents another contentious issue in grounded theory. Unsurprisingly, given their inductive position, Glaser and Strauss (1967) espoused delaying the literature review until after the analysis of data and saw anything else as a threat to induction. Whilst heavily criticised as naïve empiricism and untenable pure induction, Glaser and Strauss's (1967) stipulations represented an act of resistance to the dominant hypothetico-deductive research culture of the 1960s (Thornberg, 2012). Yet the impracticality alone of delaying the literature review has led to heavy criticism, with a range of researchers, including Charmaz (2014), Bruce (2007), Dunne (2011), Hallberg (2010) and Schreiber (2001) drawing attention to the fact that many research projects require the researcher to present a literature review and/or study proposals and ethics reports in the early stages of a project, an accurate reflection of the requirements of my PhD candidature.

Even without such academic necessities to contend with, “theoretical innocence” seems an implausible notion. Like many researchers, I have previously conducted research in my broad substantive area of interest and thus could hardly argue for being ignorant of relevant literature, even if a certain period of time separated me from my analysis of it and past, smaller-scale projects focused on different aspects of the topic area. Furthermore, scientific literature on horse-rider relationships is only one part of reviewing my field of interest and only one type of knowledge that might potentially impact upon an inductively oriented research project. My past involvement with equestrian sports, current engagement with horses, continued reading of books and articles on equestrian sport and knowledge of the lives of equestrian athletes, as well as my own perspective and first-hand experiences of the horse-rider relationship, constitute forms of knowledge about the substantive area that cannot be erased or avoided.

Thornberg (2012) has presented a valuable argument for what knowledge of extant literature may bring to a grounded theory study. As an example, my intention to study the “partnership” between horse and rider was a product of my knowledge of the substantive area. Ignoring this or other pre-existing concepts of which I was aware would have been to risk generating ideas that felt new but were simply a reinvention of the wheel (Thornberg, 2012), whilst engaging these concepts meant being able to go beyond them, through stimulating questions around them and challenging their veracity and plurality. Stern (2007) ventures that situating a grounded theory within relevant literature gives necessary credit to the work of others and is necessary to demonstrate how the current work uses extant research to “see further” (p. 123). I used sensitizing concepts as a source of inspiration and a platform on which to build and explore, albeit in a sceptical and provisional manner (Thornberg, 2012). An informed perspective on grounded theory allowed me to respect and engage valuable existing scientific literature on horse-rider relationships whilst also respecting and privileging the data I had collected. My challenge was to follow Charmaz’s (2014) advice when she says that researchers must consider what they know about their substantive area of research as problematic rather than given. Existing ideas and knowledge must earn their way into theory in the same way as raw data (Thornberg, 2012).

5.2.2.6 Iteration in Grounded Theory Research

Research that takes an iterative form is rarely reported in scientific literature in the manner in which it took place, inadvertently giving the impression of a temporal sequence of research activities. This serves to minimise what Suddaby (2006, p. 637) refers to as "the messy, nonlinear reality of grounded theory" and suggests that the research has been conducted in much the same structured, sequential form as most quantitative work (Dunne, 2011). That the content and form of my early literature review chapters differed in significant ways from the content and form of the final literature review chapters is not directly evident to the reader, except where iterations to the literature review and my analyses of the topic area are briefly outlined, as has been attempted here. My initial literature review did not address power and gender in social relationships, nor did it consider animal mindedness and anthropomorphism in any great detail. My analysis of these topics developed out of the manner in which the findings of the study called my attention to them. The limited visibility of many of these iterations in the final thesis was a necessary evil, for as Suddaby (2006) suggests, reporting the stages of an iterative project would be to present the reader with a muddled sequence of repeated stages of reviewing literature, collecting, and analysing data. Thus the current study is presented in a traditional, "linear" form consisting of literature review, research process, and study findings as this provides the reader, an outsider to the research project, with a clearer sense of the research than an iterative presentation of the research process. In drawing attention to the iterative nature of this work, however, I have attempted to preserve a sense of the research process as it occurred in real time.

5.2.2.7 Controversies and Concluding Thoughts on Grounded Theory

Several versions of grounded theory exist, leading to conflicting ideas about how grounded theory should proceed and what does and does not define grounded theory as a methodology. Perhaps not surprisingly, at certain points in the process of conducting this research, I felt the more articles and books I read on grounded theory, the less I understood about grounded theory and the more conflicted and anxious I became about undertaking it. It was worthwhile in these moments to recall Suddaby's (2006) advice to remain cognizant of grounded theory's pragmatist origins. Many of the plethora of texts on grounded theory are useful and have brought methodological depth to the methodology of this study, but interpretation is a personal, intellectual act, non-prescriptive and difficult to enunciate

(Stern, 2007) and conducting grounded theory involves educated leaps of faith. As Urquhart, Lehmann, and Myers, (2010) note, building theory requires creativity, not just the application of procedures. While grounded theory strategies can be alluring in their almost quantitative specificity (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007) flexibility must be retained lest "the technical tail…begin[s] to wag the theoretical dog" (Melia, 1996, p. 376).

Grounded theory may also appear deceptively easy in its provision of specific strategies, yet as Urquhart et al., (2010) points out, while the emphasis on data is a great strength of grounded theory, it can also make it challenging to think abstractly. Four hundred and fifty pages of data were transcribed and analysed in the process of conducting this research, and such a magnitude of data had the potential to be overwhelming. Throughout the research process it remained critical to keep in mind the core purposes of grounded theory: to understand complex social processes (Suddaby, 2006) and develop analytical theories with interpretive power (Charmaz, 2012). I took heart when reading that Charmaz (2004, p. 981) viewed "personal bewilderment" at the meanings, details, and contradictions of qualitative data as a sign of having fully engaged with the phenomenon at hand.

5.2.3 Data Collection

Data was collected via a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews, ranging in length from approximately fifteen minutes to two hours. Intensive interviewing created a flexible, open-ended avenue for exploring equestrian athletes' relationships with horses, a topic participants were well-qualified to reflect on given their experience of the phenomena at hand (Charmaz, 2014). These interviews proceeded quite differently to everyday conversations, demonstrative of the social rules of interviewing that tend to permit a deeper exploration of topics than might normally occur. As Charmaz (2014) suggests, a major advantage of scientific interviewing is the opportunity for participants to express thoughts and feelings disallowed in other contexts and social relationships. The interviews also differed from positivist strategies for studying psychological phenomena, inasmuch as I was neither in control of nor distanced from my participants (Corbin & Morse, 2003). My stance was to treat the participants as experts from whom I hoped to learn about the area under study; I was also not primarily concerned with scrutinizing the accuracy of participants' accounts of their past experiences. Charmaz (2014, p. 78) writes:

> What people say may not be what they do, have done, and would do in the future. Interviews are performances that research participants give for particular purposes.

Charmaz and Belgrave (2012, p. 350) also refer to in-depth interview data as "performed retrospective accounts," in which identity claims are made and negotiated. With respect to the possibility of participants providing misleading accounts of their lives and relationships with horses, two issues are important. First, theoretical plausibility is more important than irrefutable accuracy in grounded theory research and, second, where a researcher collects in-depth data from a large set of participants, the impact of misleading claims leading to misleading theory or a superficial analysis is significantly minimised (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, contradictions in a participant's narrative do not necessarily discredit or negate the story being told (Corbin & Morse, 2003). In telling stories, it is argued, we attempt to make sense out of what has happened and in some cases, a research interview may be the first time a participant has attempted to reconcile their experiences in a meaningful way. Moreover, as Clarke (2003, p. 556) points out, research by nature has tended to seek commonalities, whilst simultaneously "avoiding representations of the complexities, messiness, and denseness of actual situations and differences in social life." The challenge of this research work was to retain as much complexity as possible whilst simultaneously illuminating concise and critical data findings. In speaking of their relationships with horses, participants were enabled to reappraise past and current relationships and experiences and position themselves in the present in ways that fit with multiple, often part-coherent, part-fragmented discourses (Charmaz, 2014).

As previously noted, I was concerned with eliciting participants' definitions of terms such as "partnership"; I wanted to know how riders used language to define their experiences with horses, and I particularly wanted to know what "assumptions, implicit meanings, and tacit rules" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 95) underlined their understanding of horses and their relationships with them. The interview setting allowed me to penetrate participants' perspectives on sometimes contentious aspects of equestrian sport and horse-rider interaction. As long as confidentiality was preserved, participants' disclosures could take place without risk or penalty, as unlike other figures in participants' social worlds, such as coaches, team officials, and horse owners, I had little control or power over participants and they were not answerable to me in any tangible way. Participants were

encouraged to elaborate on their experiences in their own terms, and to express thoughts and feelings that might have been censored elsewhere, and this resulted in some candid admissions, such as when participants described their discomfort at having been forced by sporting team hierarchies to choose between the welfare of their horse and the performance of the team.

Participants were asked to recount their experiences in an interactive context defined by connectedness with an engaged listener. As an interviewer, I was conscious of Ezzy's (2010) emphasis on being aware of not just the cognitions that surface during interviews, but the emotions within the interviewer-interviewee relationship. Research participants risk the experiencing of powerful emotions (Corbin & Morse, 2003), something that occurred on a semi-regular basis in the interviews I conducted. A key ethical concern for me as a researcher was to be aware that my interview questions could lead to responses from interviewees that exposed personal and sometimes painful or controversial aspects of their lives. My responsibility as a researcher was to make it as comfortable as possible for participants to do so (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012) and ensure participants understood their rights as interviewees, including the right to terminate an interview. Interviews may be enjoyable but they may also be daunting experiences, particularly in that they ask participants to self-disclose without reciprocation from the interviewer (Charmaz, 2014), often with respect to highly personal, intimate aspects of their lives (Corbin & Morse, 2003). Managing this required sensitivity to the moment-by-moment progression of an interview, whilst also remaining aware that as Seidman (1991) states, the biggest challenge when conducting interviews is often to be quiet and listen.

5.2.3.2 Recruitment Processes and Interview Conditions

Participant recruitment took place through word of mouth and third-party contacts, as well as by contacting riders either via an email address provided on their website or by private messages on social media sites such as Facebook. Examining EFA and FEI competition lists allowed me to target riders who were attending an international competition at which I planned to collect data, while snowballing techniques led to further interviews. I also made contact with the EFA in the course of recruiting participants. Interviews were conducted in a number of locations, including participant's homes and public locations (i.e. a university building, equestrian competition venues), in Australia and internationally. A number of interviews were conducted at an international competition,

which will not be named to protect the anonymity of participants, as providing information about a participant's nationality, riding discipline, and the location at which the interview took place would be to jeopardise the confidentiality of the data. Participants were initially provided with an overview of the study and what would be involved in participating, as well as an electronic or hardcopy version of the information sheet, while hard copies of this document were given to all participants prior to their interview.

An information sheet for participants (Appendix A) outlined the purpose of the current study, and what was required of participants should they consent to participate. In instances where an equestrian association was used to recruit participants, an information sheet for associations (Appendix B) was provided to inform the association of the study purposes and the request for assistance in recruiting participants. Participants were asked to engage in an interview or focus group session of approximately forty minutes in length in which involvement in equestrian sports and relationships with horses would be addressed. Inclusion criteria stipulated that participants be 18 years of age or older and a current or former amateur, sub-elite, or elite rider, however, as the study progressed, only current or former elite riders were targeted. At the onset of the study, my intention was to also include participants who were indirectly involved in equestrian sport, such as coaches, judges, horse trainers, vets, sport psychologists and other individuals such as family members and grooms, however, a decision was made early in the data collection process to focus only on riders, though a number of participants were active as riding coaches and horse trainers and thus inhabited multiple roles in relation to equestrianism. In the same vein, a decision was made to conduct only interviews, though it is acknowledged that focus group data may be a valuable addition in later extensions of this work.

The ethical guidelines underpinning the study were made explicit in the information sheet, with participants informed that their participation was completely voluntary, that digital recordings of interview sessions would be stored securely and in accordance with Charles Sturt University and Australian Psychological Society ethical guidelines, while interview transcripts, field notes, and consent forms would be stored securely on a password protected computer and/or in a locked filing cabinet All participants and their horses were assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Prior to interviews, participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix C) indicating they had read the information sheet provided to them and understood the nature and purpose of the study in which they were about to participate. The consent form also addressed the right to withdraw at any time and the right to confidentiality, as well as the purposes to

which participants' data would be put. Finally, participants were asked to complete a pre-interview inventory (Appendix D) wherein they were asked to provide contact details and some demographic information, as well as information about their involvement in equestrian sport. This inventory also contained some sample interview questions to give participants an opportunity to see the types of questions they may be asked and, where possible, this document was provided to participants well in advance of the study so that they could fill out a section at the end of the inventory indicating times and days they would be available to be interviewed, though typically these arrangements were made through direct communication between the interviewer and interviewee. The final step before commencing interviews was to re-affirm previously established permission to audio-record interview sessions.

Interviews ranged in length from around fifteen minutes to one-hundred and two minutes, with the average interview taking thirty-three minutes. A total of forty-seven interviews were conducted, though two pilot interviews were not analysed. An interview schedule (Appendix E) was created through careful consideration of the topic of interest and in consultation with my supervisors. This guide was used flexibly, allowing me to probe new leads as they emerged (Charmaz, 2014). I found that revising and adjusting interview questions improved my sense of what I was trying to address in interviews and allowed me to become increasingly conscious of the language I was using to describe the phenomena, as well as my own biases, interests, and assumptions (Charmaz, 2014). I aimed to create a rapport with participants through my interview questions and to create an open, trusting environment in which participants could speak freely. Interview questions were scrutinized to ensure they were neither leading nor overly complex, inappropriately probing, or likely to evoke defensive responses from participants. Yet the extent to which interview questions are ever completely neutral may be contested; as Charmaz (2006, p. 27) states, "neutral questions do not mean a neutral interview." The past and present realities of the researcher and the research participant's lives, as well as the research setting and a myriad of other factors, set the context in which social realities are reproduced, constructed, and reconstructed.

Interview questions were designed to tap into the phenomena of interest in multiple ways in order to elicit rich, multi-layered description. In keeping with Charmaz and Belgrave's (2012) advice to begin with general questions aimed at addressing a broad range of experiences related to the phenomenon of interest, early interview questions addressed participants' equestrian backgrounds, progressing gradually into a discussion of

their current involvement in equestrian sport and their experiences of sporting relationships with horses. Specific questions about the relationship between sporting performance and horse-rider relationships, as well as communication, cohesion, and other relevant issues followed. These sensitizing concepts were treated as "a place to start inquiry, not to end it" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 30-31), while final questions addressed less personal, emotionally imbued topics and issues and thus provided an appropriate, "conversational" endpoint to each interview (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). Some overlap between questions was conceived as facilitative in allowing earlier issues to be revisited and sensitive issues to be approached from a range of vantage points.

Two pilot interviews allowed me to evaluate the clarity and usefulness of my interview questions, as well as reflect on my interviewing style and manner before beginning to collect further data. Both individuals who participated in these pilot interviews provided informal verbal feedback after the interview and completed a Pilot Interview Feedback Sheet (see Appendix F), that asked them to indicate how they had experienced the interview and the interview questions. This information was used to make minor revisions to several questions to make them easier to understand, while some minor adjustments were made to the ordering of questions. Interviews were transcribed verbatim; and in effect this was the first stage of data analyses, during which the constant comparative process commenced and memo-writing was used to provide a record of my early impressions and considerations around each interview. Finally, whilst an attempt was made to retain as much of the original meaning inhered in the interview data, as Willig (2012) notes, a transcript is not a mirror image of an interview, but an interpretation of it, reflective of an interviewer's position toward the act of researching.

5.2.4 Participant Demographic Characteristics

Institutional ethics approval for this study was provided by the Ethics in Human Research Committee of Charles Sturt University. A total of forty-seven interviews were conducted, with data from amateur riders and two pilot interviews excluded from the final analyses. The data analyses that follows is based upon the data from thirty-six participants who were classified as elite, former elite/current sub-elite, former elite/current amateur and sub-elite riders. The size of this sample is considered sufficiently large enough to support the claims made from this work, with the range, depth and breadth of accounts contained herein providing a solid foundation for the analysis that followed (Charmaz, 2004). Whilst

it was difficult to establish a universal or formal definition of “elite,” “sub-elite” and “amateur,” and there are various ways of classifying an athlete as “elite,” in the current study elite and former elite riders were those who had represented their country internationally and/or were listed on the elite squad for their respective country, while sub-elite riders were those who had competed at a national level and/or were currently listed on the National Squad for their country.

Participants were also selected based on their experience of having ridden competitively in one the following FEI equestrian disciplines: dressage, eventing, showjumping, para-equestrian dressage, endurance, vaulting, reining, and carriage-driving. Participants’ were predominantly drawn from the three Olympic sporting disciplines of dressage, eventing, and showjumping, though a number of para-dressage, endurance, and vaulting riders were also interviewed. An attempt was made to recruit participants from a variety of equestrian disciplines in order to elicit a broadly meaningful, but also sufficiently focused participant sample, in keeping with King and Horrocks’s (2010) position on diversity in qualitative interviewing. Demographic information about participants’ riding activities extended beyond these disciplines, and included other activities such as show-riding and tent-pegging, in order to provide a more holistic appraisal of the participants’ engagement in horse-related sports, however, only those participants who engaged or had engaged in one of the previously listed FEI sporting disciplines were considered to have met the inclusion criteria for participating in the study. The following table provides information on the demographic characteristics of the thirty-six participants who were included in the final data analysis.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics shown as frequencies

	N	**(%)**
Gender	36	(100.0)
Male	5	(86.1)
Female	31	(13.9)
Age		(100.0)
18-25	8	(22.2)
26-35	10	(27.8)
36-45	7	(19.4)
46-55	7	(19.4)
56-65	3	(8.3)
65+	1	(2.8)
Riding Status		(100.0)
Elite	29	(80.6)
Former Elite/Current Sub-Elite	1	(2.8)
Former Elite/Current Amateur	3	(8.3)
Sub-elite	3	(8.3)
Primary riding discipline		(100.0)
Dressage	9	(25.0)
Eventing	12	(33.3)
Showjumping	1	(2.8)
Endurance	3	(8.3)
Vaulting	4	(11.1)
Para-equestrian	7	(19.4)
Country of Origin		(100.0)
Australia	16	(44.4)
United Kingdom	2	(5.6)
United States of America	6	(16.7)
Canada	5	(13.9)
The Netherlands	2	(5.6)
Germany	1	(2.8)
South Africa	2	(5.6)
New Zealand	2	(5.6)

In keeping with qualitative research principles, sampling for the current study was driven by relevance rather than representativeness; however, certain features of the current study are notable. Eleven of the thirty-six participants were aged 46 years or older, in keeping with general trends in equestrian sport (cf. Kiger, 2012) that indicate a life-long career in equestrian sports may be more feasible for equestrians than for other sporting groups, such as professional footballers (Hickey & Kelly, 2008). There were also significantly more female participants than male. The predominance of female participants is interesting, given that equestrian sports have traditionally been a male domain, with women only engaging in Olympic level competition since 1955 (International Olympic Committee, 2014). However, as Birke and Brandt (2009) note, horse-riding is typically

considered a female pursuit, even though men and women have virtually always competed against each other (Bryant, 2008). Moreover, whilst amateur riders tend to be predominantly female (American Horse Council, 1997; Dashper, 2013; Williams & Ashby, 1995), this imbalance is less present at the elite level (Dashper, 2012), with FEI (2014f) records suggesting that elite males tend to perform on par with or better than their female counterparts, particularly in context to the high proportion of female participants seen at amateur levels (Dashper, 2012). This is not a consistent trend across equestrian disciplines, however; with recent FEI (2014f) records indicating that not one of the top ten showjumping riders in the world was female, only two of the top ten eventing riders were female, and eight out of the top ten dressage riders were female.

Just over half of participants (N = 19) identified as equestrian riding coaches, while two participants were active as equestrian judges, and fifty-percent (N =18) identified as horse trainers. Most riders engaged in equestrian sport professionally, that is, their source of income was raised through a combination of competitive and training activities oriented around horses, with some riders also breeding and selling their own horses for profit as well as training horses for other equestrian figures. Most participants engaged competitively in a single sporting discipline, but many reported riding and competing in other disciplines at a lower level, with a handful of participants competing at an elite level in more than one discipline, while the majority of participants reported first engaging in equestrian sports during childhood or their adolescent years. Finally, a number of participants were highly successful elite athletes, having achieved international acclaim with a number of horses over many years at the very highest levels of elite sport.

5.3 Data Analysis

An iterative combination of coding and comparing data, as well as writing memos and developing codes and categories through an appraisal of sources beyond the interview data, reflects the core means of data analysis. After each interview, I sought to record any impressions or thoughts that had surfaced either during or after the interview, while the transcribing process that followed allowed me to immerse myself in the interviews, this time without having to think about which question to ask next. Data analysis involved identifying ideas and patterns, as well as discontinuities, between and within interviews. Initially, I engaged in line-by-line coding, analysing and coding each segment of the text. During this phase, I attempted to encapsulate in my codes what was happening in the data,

record action, and remain close to the data (Charmaz, 2014), as well as remaining open to developing ideas about the data and flexible in my thinking about these ideas. Connecting early codes provided an analytic skeleton through which I was able to begin considering what Charmaz (2014, p. 113) calls "nascent" theory. This nascent theory directed me to further questions about the data, analysed progressively throughout the study using different strategies aimed at tentative theory development.

Data coding was not oriented toward identifying "themes" that might be present in the data, but rather around participants' actions and meanings (Charmaz, 2012). To this end, I attempted to invoke what Charmaz (2014, p. 116) refers to as "a language of action," which Clarke (2003) suggests allows for the articulation of ongoing movement of a process on an abstract, sophisticated level. My analysis also involved examining not just what was stated in the data, but what was left unsaid and what was implied in these omissions. By comparing data with data and codes with codes, I was able to identify variation within early categories. For instance, when participants were asked to describe a past performance that stood out to them, some described unsuccessful but personally satisfying experiences, while others described successful performances as their most meaningful experience, with subtle moral and identity claims implied in some, but not all, narratives. By attending to such variations, I was able to develop my thinking around topics such as the significance of performance outcomes for the horse-rider relationship. The next stage of analysis was to engage in focused coding, in which analytically significant codes that crystallized, illuminated, and synthesized early codes were used to assemble and structure a theoretical analysis of that which was represented in the data. To establish an early theoretical framework, it was important that these focused codes were central to my research questions, allowed me to condense and sharpen early codes, contained theoretical power, and rendered fresh insights about the phenomena at hand (Charmaz, 2014).

When tested against other data through constant comparative methods, some seemingly useful early codes did not, under examination, help to make analytic sense of the phenomenon at hand. Other early codes did and these were subsequently developed. An important aspect of focused coding and category development was to gradually shift away from what Urquhart et al., (2010) refer to as the overwhelming detail of line-by-line coding to a larger, more abstract view of the phenomena. As Walker and Myrick (2006) note, the beauty of grounded theory analysis is its capacity to lead to rich understandings of social life, but researchers must also deal with large amounts of empirical data that contain "multiple meanings, at both the individual and social level[s]" (p. 549). The next step was

to create tentative categories through further analysis and integration of the most significant focused codes and by specifying the relationships between codes (Charmaz, 2014). These categories are considered provisional and open to development, given the limits to theoretical sampling in the current study.

It is important to highlight the often overlooked role of insight in the data analysis process. Morse (2006) states (p. 3): "We never read, 'and then I had an idea'," perhaps because insight usually arises from a single instance, verified by other instances, and therefore is reliant upon singular, possibly erratic instances that do not fit with the traditional logic of scientific thinking. Thus insight often remains an unacknowledged part of data analysis. Insights may also be seen as unscientific in the emotionality and verve with which they may be experienced. Charmaz (2014, p. 145) states, "The code can give you a flash of insight, a way of looking at your data. It's exhilarating!" Becoming comfortable with and utilising such insights became an important part of the data analysis process of this study. Memo-writing also provided an intermediate space in which to consider, question, and refine what I saw happening in the data (Charmaz, 2012). I also used memos (rather than a research journal) to reflect on interviews and experiences that were not fully represented in interview transcripts, such as a participant's body language and tone of voice, as well as relevant features of the setting in which each interview was conducted. This helped me to contextualise and situate the data and the meanings inhered in it (Glaser, 1978) and provided a crucial space in which to consider the bigger picture and take analytic risks (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008).

5.4 Reflexivity

Emotion and subjectivity are critical to the qualitative research process (Willig, 2012). As Charmaz (2004, p. 982) states, "to learn participants' meanings, we need to be reflexive about our own." Yet reflexivity has not been uniformly accepted as relevant or helpful to grounded theory research, with Bryant and Charmaz (2007) noting the common emphasis on looking (at the data) rather than thinking (about one's preconceptions). Glaser (1978, 1992b) initially proposed that reflexivity was critical in the development of theoretical sensitivity, but later argued that reflexivity simply distracted researchers from the data (Glaser, 2002a). Moreover, while theoretical sensitivity may involve utilising personal experience as a way of developing theory, it is not inherently about examining how a researcher impacts the way data is constructed (Hall & Callery, 2001) and thus

reflexivity must be considered separately to theoretical sensitivity. Considering how one's social identity, values, personal history, academic background, ontological orientation, and past experiences have shaped what can be seen in research lies at the heart of reflexivity (Hall & Callery, 2001). Defined as an active reflection on one's own subjectivity, reflexivity becomes an act of thinking about interpretation and the ways in which interpretations are shaped by subjectivity and context (Charmaz, 2014). Reflexivity may also constitute an important means of documenting the influence of extant literature and personal ideas (Dunne, 2011). The ways in which my status on the insider-outsider continuum (with respect to the subject area and study participants) affected the research process must also be addressed, along with how the epistemological processes of the study have delimited what can be found in this research.

I am a researcher, academic, equestrian, Caucasian female from a Western background. These and other dynamics have shaped and delimited what I see and can see in my social world and in the social worlds of research. It is important to resist the temptation to "self-stereotype," however; as Gross (2009) notes; social positions are not static, simple, or generalizable, and it is easier to identify some categorizations that serve to position our views, such as gender or cultural heritage, than it is to see others, such as one's ideological position. It can thus be easy to take an authoritative stance toward one's position as a researcher, neglecting the fact that less obvious dimensions of one's personal and intellectual history may contribute to the lens through which research proceeds (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Certain dimensions of my personal identity and history may have been obvious to my participants, other aspects of my personal history are harder to identify. Either way, as Charmaz (2014) comments, research participants observe and categorize and these identifications certainly affect what they will and will not talk about in an interview.

My personal passion for horses was a prime impetus for conducting the current study. Though participants did not always enquire, many assumed or learnt over the course of our time in contact that a personal interest in horses had led to my choice of research topic. How has my personal background informed this study? It would be easy to overestimate the degree to which I have insight into the lives and experiences of elite riders because I too, ride horses. I have never competed at an elite level in equestrian sport, nor am I a professional rider. I was conscious of what could be lost and gained by participants identifying me as an "insider" to equestrian culture and sports. On one hand, I am to a greater or lesser degree, an insider to equestrian sport and this no doubt helped me to

establish rapport and understand participants' experiences. I was also aware of how my dress, speech, and general demeanour would affect my credibility, and position me as an insider or outsider. Insider status is accorded to a researcher when they share experiences, a common identity and language with the group under investigation (Asselin, 2003). It has been argued that commonalities lead to a sense of legitimacy in the researcher, can mean better rapport with participants, and a fuller knowledge and understanding of the research area (Adler & Adler, 1987; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Yet knowing more can mean seeing and asking less of the data, and assumed understandings may be more likely to affect a researcher who shares the participants' worldview or life experiences. Moreover, as Dwyer and Buckle (2009) identify, to claim full insider or outsider status is a misnomer, as "not all populations are homogenous" (p. 56); the extent to which a researcher may be an insider/outsider to the research group is neither static nor binary. A researcher doing bereavement research who has not suffered the loss of a child is nonetheless faced with mortality (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009); none of us, in this sense, are outsiders to social life.

"Insiders" may be more concerned than "outsiders" with how their knowledge and experience of the substantive area impacts what they see, but research is inevitably influenced by the researcher, whether an insider, outsider or something in between. I attempted to engage in continual reflexive awareness of self, not as an insider or an outsider, but from an intermediary position of shared experience and difference (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Whilst being familiar with equestrian sports gave me common ground on which to establish rapport with participants, I was also cognizant of the tacit assumptions underlying much of the "in-group" language in equestrian circles and aware that a certain distance between myself and participants might facilitate a deeper exploration of shared language and assumed meanings. I did not set out to emphasize the commonalities I shared with my participants nor did I try to distance myself from them, instead I attempted to distance myself from what I know, or think I know, about the substantive area in order to learn more about it.

Charmaz (2014) states that mundane questions can elicit important data and over the course of this study, I routinely asked participants to describe terms that are commonly used in equestrian circles and thus often treated as universally understood. For instance, the term "feel" is commonly used to describe an attribute required of riders to work with horses and this term was often used by participants during interviews. Asking participants' to explain terms such as this occasionally aroused discomfort in me, in part because it felt like a rhetorical question. My background in equestrian sport had informed me of some of

the ways these kinds of terms were used, but I also knew that embedded in such terms were tacit assumptions and implicit meanings that deserved open exploration. By asking participants to elaborate on such language, I knew that I was shifting myself further along the insider-outsider continuum in the direction of "outsider." It was important, however, that I distanced myself from personal concerns about appearing credible as an equestrian and focused on what would elicit the richest, most informative data.

During interviews, I noticed that older participants were more likely to take control and answer questions according to their own agenda and without concern for accuracy, where younger participants were more prone to look for reassurance that they were responding appropriately to my questions. Gender dynamics also appeared to contribute to the interview process. I wondered at times if disclosing freely about their relationships with horses, as a number of male participants did, had the potential to undermine masculine identity? Were male riders who described loving, affectionate relationships with horses subverting gender stereotypes by doing so or was it nothing more than a stereotype to expect that men might be more uncomfortable than women in talking about relationships? Were male participants who took a pragmatic approach to their interaction and relationships with horses as detached as they appeared, or did a sense of detachment serve to preserve their masculinized gender identity? Further to this, how did being interviewed by a young female interviewer impact upon participants' narratives? Whilst no male participants explicitly alluded to the issue of identity and social relationships, several female participants made reference to what they perceived as a clear gender difference between men and women in the emphasis placed on the horse-rider relationship, leading me to wonder whether this perceived difference reflects an adherence to traditional gender stereotypes in which men are seen as oriented around work, and women are seen as oriented around relationships (cf. Chodorow, 1978, 1989; Garvin, 2001; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990; Miller, 1986; Umberson et al., 1996). There are no easy answers to these questions, but in grappling with them, I was able to develop a clearer sense of how gender, power, and identity may contribute to the narratives equestrian athletes form around their relationships with horses.

Finally, the manner in which a researcher defines their research aims and questions, structures, and devises interview schedules and analyses data, all reveal assumptions that have been made about the world. These assumptions inevitably frame and alter the outcome of research. Considering these issues is a part of what King and Horrocks (2010, p. 23) call "epistemological reflexivity." Social constructionism directed me to certain

realities that defined the interviews that took place, in particular, the contextualised and negotiated process between researcher and participant of co-constructing meaning (Charmaz, 2006). Personal, professional, and epistemological assumptions all contributed to the construction of data that took place. I have attempted to be openly reflexive throughout this dissertation, not just in this section of this chapter and not just about how I affected the project as an individual, but about all aspects of the current study. From a social constructionist standpoint, it is critical that the researcher, along with the methods used, are scrutinized in the course of evaluating analytic work, as both are critical to constructions of the studied world.

5.5 Evaluating Research Quality

Qualitative data may be evaluated with regard to its credibility, transferability, dependability, trustworthiness, conformability, and reciprocity, all of which have been posited by qualitative researchers as possible replacements for the positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001). Yet the appropriateness, value, and applicability of these criterions have by no means been universally accepted as measures of "quality" in qualitative research. Hammersley (2007) argues that, in reality, qualitative researchers rarely apply explicit, concrete criteria to their research, and are much more likely to apply implicit judgements, because, as he puts it, "The task of judging quality in the context of a relatively complex activity like research cannot be sensibly reduced to the application of explicit, concrete, exhaustive indicators" (p. 289). The theoretical, methodological, and value-based assumptions that divide qualitative researchers, as well as the varying methods they use, suggest that qualitative research cannot or should not be evaluated in a uniform fashion. I have therefore attempted to limit this discussion of quality indicators to those that are considered appropriate to a social constructionist grounded theory methodology.

The quality of a grounded theory research project depends fundamentally on the quality of the data collected, with nuanced theory development dependent on "rich, substantial, relevant data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 18). The construct of authenticity also beckoned as an appropriate way of evaluating the current study. Manning (1997) suggests claims to authenticity invoke questions of fairness, as well as ontological, educative, catalytic, and tactical authenticity. To this end, I attempted to balance differing perspectives (without, of course, claiming a neutral stance towards them) and reflected on

the "meaningfulness and usefulness" of my research (Manning, 1997, p. 94). I also considered credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness as relevant indicators of the quality of this study (Charmaz, 2014). The credibility of this research work was furthered by intimate familiarity with the setting and topic area; I also had access to rich interview data from a range of sources and was able to draw on this to provide evidence for my categorical and theoretical claims, while the logical links between the data and my argument and analysis provide further evidence of the credibility of the work (Charmaz, 2014).

The extent to which I have sought to make the research process transparent adds further veracity to the claims of the study. I have attempted to follow Bruce's (2007) lead when she notes that being transparent about what was done is critical to the quality and integrity of research outcomes and this includes acknowledging the limits and problematic aspects of the methodology and theoretical perspective employed. The extent to which this work provides new insights and fresh ways of considering horse-rider relationships may also determine its theoretical value and originality. Patton (2002) describes the necessity of considering whether research work is stimulating and provocative, as well as how and in what ways it expands our thinking, and affects the audience who appraise it. Rather than expecting an entirely new model of thinking, it is important to consider the ways in which this nascent theory challenges, extends, and refines existing concepts, empirical and otherwise. One important way of judging the quality of this research is to consider how well the developing theory addressed therein explains the problems and processes faced by horse and rider in equestrian sport (Weed, 2009). Does it deal with the real concerns of those who ride horses competitively, and is the theory able to be extended, and developed to accommodate new ideas that might emerge through further theoretical saturation (Weed, 2009)? Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) argue that theory must reach into the abstract, fit the data, and challenge, stimulate, and reflect plausibly on the problem domain. Judgments about research quality are interactive and open-ended; the extent to which the categories presented in subsequent chapters elucidate the substantive area will largely determine the merit and veracity of the work.

Having approached this project from a constructionist perspective, it is critical to also approach quality indicators as guiding forces rather than as detached (positivist) prescriptions (Schwandt, 1996), in keeping with the contextual emphasis of the constructionist approach (Sparkes, 1998). Judgements are not made about qualitative research separate from the work itself (Smith, 1993) as abstract standards and rule-based

judgements of research quality are not in keeping with the subjective ethos that shapes qualitative inquiry. Authenticity criteria must be considered flexibly in relation to the data and the stories contained in it (Sparkes, 1998). Whilst grounded theory does not aim directly to invoke the stories and lives of individuals, it was nonetheless important that my analysis remained faithful to the collective stories of participants, in both content and tone. In conceptualising issues of accuracy in interview-based methodologies, it is necessary to consider that while a relativist ontological stance permits and indeed encourages a world in which realities are personal, constructed, and impermanent, no doubt some accounts are more accurate than others and whilst construction is acknowledged, it is important to contextualise to what extent "accuracy" is relevant to constructionist research. Charmaz (2004, p. 986) speaks of being faithful to the studied world by considering how participants construct it, defining accuracy as "excavating the implicit meanings in our participants' statements and actions." Thus by recording participants' behaviours, dialogue, language, actions, and expressions, we can, within a constructionist framework, seek accuracy in description and analysis, but not without acknowledgement of the role of context. Facts are, as Charmaz (2004) notes, the product of values. To this extent, the overarching quality of this research work may be defined according to the answer to the following question, posed by Reed (2010, p. 36): "Does this piece of theory allow social researchers to interpret how social meaning works, in certain times and places?"

Saturation is a complex, influential, problematic aspect of qualitative research practice. Mason (2010) states that the major determinant of sample size in qualitative research is, or should be, the concept of saturation yet the point at which saturation has been reached is difficult to identify. Further to this, Dey (1999) argues that saturation is problematic because regardless of how it is conceived, a premature foreclosure of categories is always a possibility, and where this occurs, a false sense of saturation may follow. Grounded theory's iterative melding of data collection and analysis can make it particularly challenging to identify the point at which saturation has been reached (Suddaby, 2006), however, Dey (2007) suggests that a researcher may 'stop' when they can no further develop, elaborate, or refine a category or theoretical conception. Yet as Glaser and Strauss (1967) observe, there is always a possibility that collecting further data can produce unexpected insights, leading to further theoretical developments. Theoretical sufficiency may thus be a more suitable goal than theoretical saturation, as the former does not imply the same finality about the analysis process (Andrade, 2009; Dey, 1999). Elaborating and refining theory are both equally important aspects of theory production;

focusing solely on building density into a theory through saturation can lead researchers to underestimate the importance of parsimony and precision in theory development (Dey, 2007).

Sample size also represents a contentious issue in qualitative research. Charmaz (2014) argues that the intentions, breadth and complexity of the research topic under examination must be considered when determining sample size, with large samples preferable where credibility of the research findings is sought and the researcher aims to develop the work in an analytic direction. To this Langley (1999) adds that a substantial number of comparable, densely described incidents are needed when analysing process data, while Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2005) caution qualitative researchers against the common assumption that qualitative studies must rely on small samples. Relatively large sample sizes are not necessarily antithetical to the tenets of qualitative research (Charmaz, 2014; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2005) and may facilitate well-grounded theory, thus the sample size of the current study was deemed appropriate to the scope and aims of the research.

5.6 Ethical Considerations

Intensive interviewing enabled me to engage personally with participants' stories and narratives; it also rendered visible the personal life experiences of individuals who by virtue of their elite athlete status were already in many cases well-known public figures, at least within equestrian circles. Thus a major ethical imperative of the current study was to monitor the potential for a breach of confidentiality that might inadvertently reveal a participant's identity. Benzies and Allen (2001, p. 545) state that "in the process of inquiry, researchers have an inescapable moral responsibility to be sensitive to the lives and circumstances of the people about whom they wish to learn." At face value, the topic I was asking participants to talk about was pleasant and non-confronting. Talking about horses and relationships with them in many ways represented an opportunity to express sentiments about a meaningful and positive aspect of many participants' lives. Over the course of the study, however, it became evident that participants' dialogues could also elicit emotional distress and had the potential to impact upon their careers should confidentiality be breached, and thus participating in the study carried certain risks. Moreover, as Charmaz (2004) suggests, the extent to which we are able to fully anticipate

potential harm or risk to participants may be questioned, for as research progresses, new realities emerge and with them, new ethical considerations.

As this project continued, I became increasingly aware of the political dynamics underlying what riders' disclosed about their relationships with horses. For instance, one participant "confessed" that he had not put much time into one of his horses prior to a recent competition, which he felt led to a poor performance and he knew disclosing this to the horse's owners could have negative consequences for him as a professional rider. While no doubt all participants experience interviews differently, several dynamics may have routinely impacted upon how elite riders experienced the process. Many elite participants from mainstream equestrian disciplines such as dressage, eventing, and showjumping were well accustomed to being sought out for interviews of a journalistic nature, and this inevitably affected their expectations of the interview process, as well as their actual experience of being interviewed. In some instances, participants required careful reassurance and clarification of the scientific and ethical principles undergirding the current study.

Respecting participants' privacy was more complex than simply anonymising the data, while consent is also an ongoing process in qualitative interviewing, and cannot be considered *fait accompli* simply because the consent form has been signed (King & Horrocks, 2010). I was careful to remind participants during interviews that they did not have to respond to questions. On several occasions this felt particularly necessary, such as when discussing the death of a treasured horse, regardless of whether or not the participant demonstrated obvious signs of emotion or distress. The ultimate aim of the interviews was not to interrogate, but to gather information relevant to the topic under consideration (Corbin & Morse, 2003). As well as having the potential to be a challenging experience, however, intensive interviews may also be transformative. As Kvale (1984) notes, the act of speaking to an "other" who is genuinely, uncritically engaged in your story and with whom you share a common interest can be personally enriching and this was evident in interview sessions.

Another ethically complex issue relevant to the current project was that of power and control within the research process. As Neuman (2011, p. 154) notes, "If you freely give information about yourself for research purposes, do you lose all rights to it?" Elite riders often speak not just for themselves, but for their brand, and in some cases, the integrity of that brand is monitored and controlled by a team of individuals. The ways in which participants' interview data was presented and used in this study had potential

implications for not just individual riders, but for corporate identities and, more generally, for the image of equestrian sport, particularly in light of increasing ethical concerns around the sport. Equity in research is a challenging concept to address. Hall and Callery (2001) state, "researchers who are contemplating predicting and controlling other people's lives through explanatory theories have a moral obligation to emphasize equity in their power relationships with participants." In asking participants to speak about their relationships with horses, I was asking them to reveal information that directly reflected on them personally and professionally; participants may have been accorded a certain measure of control over the course, pace, and content of the interview session, but what happens next?

The act of analysing data and the implications this has for the power-control dynamics that underlie qualitative research must be considered from an ethical vantage point. Following data collection, responsibility and power over the study findings rests largely in the hands of the researcher who makes claims about meaning (Willig, 2012) that may have important implications for the study cohort. Interpretations can be used in a variety of ways, including to cause harm, and therefore they raise ethical questions. Moreover, interpretation by definition involves what Willig (2012, p. 19) calls "a degree of appropriation," bringing into consideration issues of representation and misrepresentation. It was important to remain reflective about my own interpretations, as well as conscious of their limitations. I sought to be, as Willig (2012, p. 56-57) "modest" about what my interpretations could reveal and to be clear that these are my interpretations and thus provide only one reading, however useful or otherwise, of the phenomena at hand.

5.7 Summary

This chapter has addressed the epistemological and methodological tenets of the current study, with respect to critical features of social constructionist grounded theory. An argument has been made for the choice of methodology and the manner in which it was employed in the current study. The quality of this work, and its ethical underpinnings have also been outlined, along with reflexive considerations aimed at contextualising study findings in ways appropriate to a constructionist research study. This chapter leaves us ready to embark on the key findings of the study, outlined in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 6 Understanding Horse-Rider Relationships in an Elite Context

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin by outlining the demographic features of the participant sample. The ways participants understood and managed their personal-professional relationships with horses will then be explored. The code experiencing complex, intimate relationships with horses will then be addressed with particular attention to communication, conflict and emotion between horse and rider. Finally, interdependency and vulnerability in horse-rider relationships will be discussed in context to the dynamics of equestrian dyadic interaction. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings.

6.2 Contextualising Horse-Rider Interaction in Elite Sport

A number of participants were engaged in full-time paid work within the equestrian sector, though some did not work professionally with horses. Participants commonly worked ten to twelve hour days with horses six to seven days a week, a considerable time-commitment that extends beyond that of full-time work. A heavy workload sometimes meant having to overlook the finer aspects horse-rider interaction, as Jim notes:

> I start at 6am and finish at 8:30pm and think that's an early night, you know like umm I just don't get a, enough time to work on it, I work on it everyday with my staff but… I've also got to pay the bills and ahh so part of my life is definitely leant to being commercial as well (P110).

Time spent working with horses differed somewhat according to sporting discipline, with vaulting participants reporting less encompassing contact with horses than dressage, showjumping, and eventing participants, while despite still investing large amounts of time in horses, para-equestrian participants tended to express a more flexible, pleasure-based orientation toward horses than able-bodied participants. Participants regularly worked multiple horses on a daily basis, though this varied according to sporting discipline and individual circumstances. Dressage, eventing, and showjumping participants reported working up to sixteen to seventeen horses a day, while endurance, para-equestrian, and vaulting participants worked around one to two horses on a regular basis, though some worked larger numbers. Health and financial constraints influenced the number of horses para-equestrians were able to work, while the majority of vaulters and

endurance participants were aged between 18 to 25 years and did not ride professionally due to school and other commitments.

Most participants had worked with their current competition horse for a number of years, but there were exceptions. Ellie, Ellen, and Amy were all competing borrowed horses, while Hayley had vaulted on over seventeen different horses in the year prior to our interview, and was competing on a horse she had been vaulting on for approximately two months. Showjumping rider Bruce referred to his current competition horse as "the main one at this stage, but they do come and go" (P129), while Crystal had only started riding her current competition horse five months prior to a major international competition, describing their relationship as a "fast track thing" (P138). Horses were an all-encompassing part of life for participants, though many described relying on professional help to care for their horses, an inevitable consequence of working large numbers of horses and running an equine-oriented business. Yet as Natalie outlines, managing horses is an important part of horsemanship and may be critical to developing strong horse-rider relationships:

> You can get a groom to do all that [horsemanship] stuff but that doesn't give you that hands on feel and that whole partnership with the horse that you develop. It's *that* time doing *that* stuff that actually creates, that creates that partnership, not just riding (P123).

Not all riders are readily able to spend time with horses away from riding, however, with para-equestrian participants in particular reporting logistical difficulties related to routinely accessing their horses. Grace drove over one-hundred kilometres three times a week on top of working full-time in order to work her horses and stable them at a suitable facility, while Melissa and Crystal described being unable to ride professionally, manage an equestrian business, and all aspects of their horse's lives, though this was something that was viewed as a unfortunate part of the transition from amateur to professional riding, as Melissa notes:

> If I didn't teach and I just had six horses I'd have someone to help feed up and that would be it. I love grooming, I love doing their boxes. I just don't get to do that 'cos I just couldn't do all that and ride six horses (P109).

In an attempt to remain connected with her horses despite these pressures, Crystal integrated a twenty-minute "pre-workout" space into her riding routine, a time she used to

develop her awareness of the horse's physical and emotional state and momentarily shift the focus of riding sessions away from performance and training outcomes.

Being able to work with a range of different horses was critical and in some cases, viewed as more important than honing deep relationships with just one or two horses. Although some suggested compatibility was important, having unique experiences of compatibility with a horse could inhibit a rider's ability to produce other horses, leading to what Jim described as the one-hit wonder phenomenon. Participants were philosophical and pragmatic about compatibility in horse-rider relationships, often prioritising equine ability over horse-rider compatibility. Dressage rider, Kelly, stated, "You just go 'okay well this is...' with her, that was the horse that I had at the time and I wanted a Grand Prix horse so I just kept going until we'd you know, we did it" (P117). Riding different horses represented an opportunity for personal growth as a rider, but could be disruptive and stressful in other ways. Eventing rider Ethan described a "disastrous round" on his "talented one-star horse" that he suspected was the result of failing to focus his energy on the horse prior to the competition:

> This I can't tell the owners but I look back on it and I wonder if it was 'cos I was tied up with the three-star horse and not giving him [one-star horse] as much attention? That's a tough job as a professional rider, giving them all your undivided attention (P113).

Working large numbers of horses concurrently may be a relatively recent development in elite equestrian sport, with former elite eventing rider, Georgina, describing this shift with reference to the mainstay of her own career:

> I would have been riding all...all morning, probably from seven [a.m.] till one [p.m.] and sometimes a little bit afterwards, but we, if we had six advanced horses in our string and maybe a couple of young horses, we had more horses than anybody else, nowadays they have *thirty*, I find it mindboggling how it's moved on (P134).

Having too few horses to work could also represent a source of stress for an elite rider. Para-equestrian Amy could only afford one horse, leaving her with little security as a professional athlete. Finding a sponsor was pivotal to her security as an athlete (Dashper, 2014), while participants were aware of the gradual evolution of equestrian sport in this respect, with Jim noting, "In the past you know, you could still buy three-hundred dollar

ex-racehorses and go to the Olympics on them; umm, I think that's less and less becoming the case" (P110). While it is not impossible to succeed at the elite level on an inexpensive horse, an Olympic level horse may cost upwards of five million dollars (Caple, 2012), while having a string of horses protects riders given that elite horses may be unexpectedly sold, injured, or transferred to another rider. The annual cost of competing a single elite horse is estimated at around $40-61,000, with an investment of $35,000 or more often seen in the lead-up to an Olympic Games (Burnett, 2014; Bosch, 2012). Given these expenses, elite equestrians who are financially dependent on owners and sponsors may be in the majority, with only a small number of participants able to independently own and manage their horses.

Participants managed their relationships with multiple horses by categorising horses according to their function or purpose, differentiating in particular between short-term and long-term horses, with a more distanced stance taken toward the former, as Jane notes, "You get a very different relationship with a horse that you're intending to take all the way to a horse that you're intending to sell, hugely different relationship" (P107). Participants also used the concept of ownership to differentiate between horses and their relationships with them, a fluid concept that extended beyond legal parameters, as Kelly describes in relation to her first Grand Prix horse: "I didn't own him but he was mine. I think he thought he was mine and I thought he was mine so yeah, I would say it was [a] very good [relationship] (P117). Although rider-owner relationships were not often raised during interviews, in some instances, owners had a significant influence on the interaction between horse and rider. Endurance rider Ellie had experienced considerable conflict with her horse's owner over his training, creating problems in Ellie's relationship with the horse that took careful management to resolve.

Being answerable to financially invested third-parties may be stressful for riders, with Mark Todd (2012) describing the deep feelings of disappointment and guilt he felt after his horse became unsound at the Barcelona Olympics, "I had this awful feeling of letting everyone down, the Welmans, the rest of the team, and all the sponsors who had come over with such expectation" (p. 83). Forming an emotionally close relationship with a third-party owned horse could also create emotional stress and an unstable relational climate. Ethan's vulnerability was evident when he stated, "I wouldn't dare tell the owners of this horse I've got, but umm I love her [the horse] to bits, I'd hate to lose the ride on her" (P113). Amy had experienced distress at having to part with a leased horse, yet

ownership rights did not necessarily protect a rider from the commercial forces of elite sport, as Natalie describes:

> That was the kinda story really you know, for every horse that you had, you had five others you had to sell to be able to keep, which is always sad but you know that's the way we had to do it and that's the way it is (P123).

These findings suggest that the context in which elite horse-rider relationships are established is increasingly influenced by professionalization and commercialisation (Dashper, 2014) and financial pressure (Bosch, 2012; Caple, 2012; Rudolph, 2009), heightening the potential for a product-based orientation to elite sport horses. Participants had heavy workloads that revolved around horses and established relationships with horses in a climate of commercial interest and competitive pressure with horses they often did not own or have full control over, while the ability to work with a large number of horses, often on a short-term basis, represents an interesting dimension of elite horse-rider relationships. Although this participant sample is by no means intended or assumed to be representative of the broader elite equestrian milieu, a snapshot of the lives of a cohort of elite equestrians has been provided, giving contextual depth to the study findings that follow.

6.3 Category: Managing Personal-Professional Relationships with Horses

Participants' constructed a relational dynamic between horse and rider characterised by personal and professional interpersonal interaction, with elite horse-rider relationships occupying a liminal space between pleasure and professionalism, pragmatism and empathy. On one side, a pragmatic, commodity-based exchange system appeared to operate in which the horse was valued predominantly in accordance with its ability to achieve competitive ends. On the other, participants experienced deeply personal, emotionally engaging relationships with horses, akin in meaning, significance, and intimacy to a human relationship. Whilst potentially facilitative in other ways, emotional attachment had the potential to be problematic in elite horse-rider relationships. Eventing rider and Olympian, Claire, took a pragmatic approach to horses, but shared a special relationship with her Olympic horse, Ronny, a horse that cost her very little to purchase. Not long after purchasing him and before the pair had gained a competitive reputation, Claire discovered Ronny needed a series of complicated, expensive surgical procedures:

> The vet said "this could be an on-going thing, are you willing to do this or do you just put him down?" You know and that was just not a… I remember the day when he said it and like it just wasn't an option because I just loved the horse so much (P120).

Claire described the decision to save Ronny as straightforward because of her attachment to him, yet investing around $15,000 on three separate surgical procedures to save an unproven horse that might not even survive surgery or recover, might well be viewed dubiously from a professional perspective. Endurance rider, Hannah, told me how she formed attachments with all her horses, but recognised that it was often necessary to sell them. Yet much of our interview was dominated by discussion of Hannah's current endurance horse, Chance, towards whom she refused to act in a commercially-minded fashion:

> This one I brought here now umm he's my, I got a big big offer to sell him two years ago, I mean, money won't replace that horse. He's my, I don't know, we just have a connection, I will never sell that horse, I've got horses at home, I love my horses, I'm crazy about them, but I mean, if the money is good and you need it, then I will sell them but this one, I will never sell…I've got the relationship with this horse that I don't have with any of my other horses (P125).

Hannah was able to prioritise one horse over making money, but this was the exception to the rule, with her financial stability revolving around the production of competition horses. Although the relationship between horse and rider was worth more to Hannah than success, withdrawing from competitions and prioritising the horse's welfare came at a competitive cost that affected not just Hannah, but her equestrian business and the team who travelled with her and helped her prepare for competitions. Indeed, she described her interaction with horses as "like a full-time job without getting paid" (P125). For many participants, horse-rider interaction had changed significantly over time. Participants accepted the professional impetus that defined their current horse-rider relationships, but reflected nostalgically upon their early-career relationships with horses, characterised by naivety, enjoyment, and minimal pressure to succeed, as Tegan describes:

> It wasn't so competitive then, I was going through college, and umm so he [Tokito] was more of umm...like a friend, you know than anything and umm I, we just rode for fun and everything was just for fun (P142).

Professional showjumper and eventer, Kathy differentiated between amateur and elite relationships with horses, describing the relationship with her first elite-level horse as symbolic of "the no pressure years," a time before she was expected to "produce an Olympic horse" (P115). As the interview continued, it became increasingly evident that Kathy's orientation to horses had shifted over time, notable in her appraisal of her relationship with this first elite-horse with whom she had progressed from amateur-level riding to the world stage:

> Look as I say it was kind of like the kid friendship kind of thing a bit and less of a professional relationship than you'd have with the horses now. And certainly there's times when I'm affectionate with them but you know…there's the pressure to run, to run a business and you know, have lots of horses (P115).

Vaulting participant, Claudia, associated her sporting involvement with a love of horses, but believed this was an added bonus in an elite context, referring to horse-rider interaction as about "sharing the work as you would two people" (P140). Claire was also clear and unapologetic about her professional orientation to horses:

> I sorta only give them a couple of years, like definitely a year into it if they show potential you keep going but you know if they haven't progressed on from there you have to make the decision to sack them cos I'm not here to go "oh I completed the [name of three-day event competition], you beauty!"….so yeah if they don't perform, if they don't show any of the, enough ability, they're just gone (P120).

Eventing rider, Matthew, also stressed his competitive orientation to the sport:

> …remembering that I'm doing this, isn't just for fun, and to make money, which I don't make any of, it's to win and go well so if you do all that and don't go well and you do it again and don't go well, I mean you still have a relationship [with the horse], it's probably not a very good one! …I've got to have results at the end. There's no use being "it's just a lovely horse to ride, and I love riding him and I go out and get nowhere every single time I go out."

> Oh well, I'll just get rid of that one cos I don't do it for that reason where some people might want to do it for that reason, I don't want to do it for that reason (P111).

Although most participants described horse-rider relationships that were shaped and motivated by professional and personal factors, Melissa suggested that some elite riders are exclusively motivated by competitive outcomes, describing a conversation she had had with a fellow eventer who revealed that he saw no purpose in riding or being around horses unless to prepare for an upcoming competition. In contrast, Melissa saw her own sporting participation as revolving around her love of horses and riding, yet her professional focus was evident when she described being motivated to continue to ride during a competition-free period in order to "get ahead of the game a bit" (P109). Bruce also held a professional, performance-based approach to horses, equating a horse's value with its ability to succeed competitively. Achieving professional success was a pre-requisite to developing a personal relationship, something Bruce was unequivocal about, stating, "It's all about winning…that's what everybody's here for" (P129). He reminded me that in the competition at which he was about to compete, the final round of jumping would involve riding other finalists' horses for just five minutes before jumping an international course. This example served to emphasize technical ability and minimise the importance of relational affiliation, as Bruce described it, "the partnership is not going to be a great issue, the riders will all be good and they'll just get on and do the job…you know it's like a job" (P129).

Understanding equestrian sport in these terms may result in minimising the status of the horse-rider relationship and reducing the horse to the status of an object or sporting tool (Dashper, 2014). In the professional context in which Bruce operates, this approach appeared to fit with what is required to achieve performance-related goals. Other participants described how focusing on their personal connection with a horse could have negative performance outcomes, as Crystal had experienced:

> I had a very big horse that I fell in love with and everybody said "no, he's gonna be too lazy" and, twice the size of the one I have now and I loved him and I was determined and then I, it was...torturous! (laughter)…I won't make that mistake again (P138).

Interestingly, Jim considered it important to be clinical about horses because of the emotions that are invested once a relationship is established:

> You do need to think pretty clinically about it to try and, you're gunna spend, there's a lot of emotion invested in this so you know, before you start that part of the journey you'd like to have it so the piece of equipment you're going to invest all your emotion in is likely to respond and come careering back you know, going "let's go" (P111).

Jim's narrative encapsulates the detachment and emotion that may simultaneously shape horse-human interaction in an elite context, referring to the horse as a "piece of equipment" within a broader narrative that emphasizes the emotional depth of horse-rider relationships. Balancing sensitivity with competitiveness may also be a challenge for elite riders. Eventing rider, Amelia, described being "really competitive and never, never happy with the work" (P119). She believed an ambitious sporting approach was necessary, but acknowledged that being driven by ambition could culminate in being "too demanding and unsympathetic" toward horses (P119). While taking an objective approach to horses may reap dividends, as Jim argues, equestrian athletes may also benefit from a more subjective, intuition-based approach to horses. A number of participants described their attempts to develop or maintain an instinctual, spontaneous way of working horses, amidst pressure to ride in technically oriented ways according to team- or coach-based instructions. Elite riders for whom horse-riding is essentially a business must be, as Ethan noted, highly organised and goal-oriented in their interaction with horses, but remaining flexible was also critical. Flexibility could also improve decision-making with respect to equine partners, something evidenced in Val eventually being successfully paired with a horse that she initially believed would be unsuitable for her.

Constructions of masculinity and femininity appeared relevant to the interplay of professional and personal dynamics in horse-rider relationships. A number of female participants' stressed that for them, forming a personal relationship with horses was important, but that this was less important for larger, stronger male riders. Amongst them was dressage rider Diana, who believed bonding with horses led to reciprocally rewarding exchanges, yet she also expressed doubts about this stance after observing male riders achieve, in some but not all instances, positive outcomes through force:

> I see these big strong men here riding and, and, how can I say, yeah they push to the limit everyday and sometimes twice a day and, then I see the test, and with some horses yesterday, also one exploded really and the other horse makes his job, they do their job. That is what they've been taught and they do it, so sometimes I'm thinking "hmm, maybe I should do a little bit more…" but, my feeling is not right, I really want to enjoy the training and enjoy the riding and if I go home in the evening I like to see the happy faces of the horses.... And for my-, I don't have a lot of strength you know, I have to ride on my feeling, so they [horses] have to give to me, I cannot push a horse to the limit and expect he will do his job (P126).

Diana described riding from feel rather than force because of her inability to use force, bringing into question the emphasis female participants placed on relationships with horses. Graysmith (2008) notes how society expects men to interact with the world as "performance-based beings" (p. 74), while Marini (1988) contends that males are socialised to behave in ways that create barriers to intimacy (i.e. aggression and competitiveness), but females are encouraged to acknowledge their emotions, nurture others, and form close relationships. Yet if female riders do prioritise personal relationships with horses in sport more than males, is this because they are relationally oriented, as has been argued (cf. Marini, 1988) or simply because they are unable to use force to achieve performance outcomes? Claire endorsed a strong relationship as a form of competitive currency for a physically weaker or more relationally oriented rider, stating:

> Oh look maybe for female riders it has to be more [a partnership], where for the males, I mean a horse [that] doesn't want to do it those males can just make them do it, you know they're a different kettle of fish those strong riders but I think for a girl, me anyway, I couldn't go out there riding around say that two-star track on something that is a stopper or you know, I've got to feel like that horse will save me if I get a dodgy ride you know and I'll save it if it's not coping (P120).

Claire's narrative suggests that in a sporting realm in which men and women compete as equals, the relational orientation of female riders may allow them to compensate for a lack of physical strength in comparison with their stronger male

counterparts. Yet a harmonious horse-rider relationship also constituted a fundamental part of enjoying the sport for Claire:

> That's how I enjoy the sport though that I don't want to ride no ding-bat around, yeah, I'm not like [rider's name], he can pull anything around, I mean that's why he's brilliant, but for me that's not, I want to feel safe and I'm cantering out of that start box and that horse is behind me and I'm behind it (P120).

Interestingly, Claire refers to a male eventer as "brilliant" for "pulling anything around," while female riders who engaged in this way with horses were described as "operators" (P120), implying that interacting with horses in mechanical, even manipulative ways is a part of a male's sporting success. The same rules did not appear to apply to female riders. Furthering the complexity of gender dynamics in personal-professional horse-rider relationships, several male participants described deeply personal relationships with horses, though in the case of Jim, a traditionally masculine narrative was drawn upon to counterbalance the emotion of horse-rider relationships:

> When I'm riding, like you know, I consider myself really tough, but when I'm riding a horse that you know I'm performing with it, it's my, my mate. Now I don't go up and pat my mates and say "couchy, couchy," I just need to glance at him sideways and he knows I'm there, that's all it takes…my horses know that when I'm in that saddle they'll go to, they can go to war, and that I will not *ever* pull up on them. I'll go, I'll support them with everything I've got, and they in return will do the same. That's what a partnership is, you know where you know that no matter what turn you take, whether things get better or worse or you know, that you stick together. And that together, you have a chance of overcoming odds like the cross-country course here on Sunday, which can kill you, make no mistake about that (P110).

Jim's words, "whether things get better or worse" were strikingly reminiscent of wedding vows, highlighting the absolute commitment that defined his relationships with horses. Although Jim distanced himself from a purely affection-based style of relating to horses, his account was by no means devoid of emotion. Instead, he redefined the horse-rider relationship as one of mateship, conceptualised in terms of reciprocity and emotional engagement in the face of exhilarating challenges and risks. Emotionality toward horses

may represent a threat to objectivity and professionalism for male and female riders. Natalie described herself as soft towards horses and had been criticised for this, while Georgina noted how her softness had the potential to create behavioural problems in her horses. On the other hand, being emotional about horses and performance outcomes could be crucial in elite sport. After twenty-eight years of competitive riding, Melissa believed it was important to experience emotion, describing her own emotional pain after making a mistake at the Olympics that she felt had cost her horse a gold medal:

> I think if you don't have emotion there, it doesn't affect you emotionally, like you're not feeling it properly, you're not actually in it! I think it's gotta be one that definitely tears you apart sometimes (P109).

Remaining emotionally connected to athletic performances and to horses was also highlighted by dressage rider, Elizabeth:

> Everyday, when I go and prepare to leave the house, to go and ride my horse, I have butterflies (pause). If you go to competition and you don't have that, then I believe you shouldn't be there. (P124).

Such narratives speak to the habituation that may result from consistently interacting with horses in a competitive context, while other participants described how their reactions toward success shifted from exhilaration to relief, sometimes even apathy, as their athletic status increased. Indeed, a number of participants' described an amateur-level success as their most meaningful riding achievement to date, a surprising and intriguing finding given the number of participants who had won Olympic medals, amongst other notable successes. Melissa described how winning her first three-day left her "hot," "tingly," "proud" (P109), while her experience of winning as an elite rider was marked by less intense emotions:

> You get to a stage, this stage now, you win an event and you go "oh yeah I won an event," you know, and I just go "that's kind of...sad." You win an event and don't get excited about it? … I think it's, it's hard not to become complacent when you've got really good horses behind you and then when I lose these horses and bring other ones which maybe aren't going to be as good, the win's going to be very exciting again for me, you know, but then, again not

> pressure's on you, but people expect you to win…and you can't seem to be too excited cos you just, 'be cool' you know and it's a bit like that (P109).

Not unlike participants in Arluke's (1994) research on emotion management in animal shelter employees, but from a different vantage point, a number of participants feared reaching a point where riding became mechanical and they became desensitized toward horses and performance outcomes. Melissa noted how reacting emotionally to sporting outcomes contravened expectations of elite athletes, while Kathy had been criticised by her coach for being "unprofessional" for talking aloud to her horse whilst competing. Similar to Melissa, Claire's most memorable performance was not her Olympic medal winning performance, but an Olympic selection event:

> I won that one [selection event], and that was the best event I've ever had, the most fun I've ever had, because I had nothin' to lose, whereas now I ride as an *Olympian*, whereas before that I was just myself and yeah, had so much fun and never felt nervous (P120).

The pressure to succeed once one becomes known as a rider may detract from experiences of competitive success, as Jim notes:

> Once you're recognised as being one of the good riders, it, it changes, it's almost a relief when you do well, you know, where when I see some of the kids that are working for me, when they win their first one it's so emotional, I get a real kick out of that, it's beautiful…but it also means that once they've won something big, like a World Cup and things, well then they're almost under the gun…that's a little bit the nature of performance, you win, and then you go "oh God, good, that was good, I just beat them all, held them off for another time." Things change a bit (P110).

One way of maintaining a passion for horses and sport is to make sporting pursuits secondary to other professional activities or to ensure one's primary source of income does not depend on horses. Amelia told me how she had made a decision to maintain a professional life outside of horses, describing here the impact this had on her interaction with horses and her attitude towards equestrian sport:

> It works really well, I've had the best year that I've ever had competition-wise and I think because I'm doing, I'm doing it the way that I like to do it. And I

> was riding twelve, fifteen horses a day, then it was a job, and I, I don't know, then I sort of, you end up, just like any job it's, it's a job… at the end of the day. I think you've got to enjoy the horse and you've gotta love riding them to ride them really well and umm so now I work in the office and my nicest part of the day is when I ride (P119).

Even though Amelia's current involvement with horses is equivalent to a part-time work commitment or more, and she continued to ride at an elite level, choosing to compartmentalise horses as separate from her professional life enabled her to remain mentally and emotionally engaged with horses and sport. This arrangement had not changed the amount of time she spends riding her own horses, but instead of being around horses for twelve to fourteen hours a day, she now spends around four hours a day with them. Lara, a young endurance rider, also described how commitments outside of horses prevented her from overriding and had a positive impact on her interaction with horses (P132). Redefining performance success was another strategy used to minimise the friction between the professional and personal dimensions of equestrian sport, though de-emphasizing competitive outcomes was challenging, particularly for those riders most affected by the commercialisation of the sport. A long-term view of horse-rider relationships could also be helpful in managing personal-professional horse-rider relationships, with this approach exemplified by dressage rider, Elisa, whose most personally and professionally significant relationship with a horse took a great deal of time to establish. She described Arrow as initially "oversensitive" (P146), and lacking in confidence, leading to a lengthy period of unsuccessful performances, during which Elisa's focus was on establishing a trusting horse-rider relationship:

> He was so scared that sometimes I had to give up in the test because he was too scared to go past an umbrella or something and then I would, well I would sit on him, and sit on him for a couple of hours walking after the competition and show him everything…he would see things and he had the time to watch everything and yah, take his own time that he needed to be well with it (P146).

These long hours spent habituating Arrow to the competition environment demonstrated willingness on Elisa's part to move forward toward competitive goals in small, incremental steps and prioritise relationship building over performance success. Arrow subsequently progressed from "nothing to winning an Olympic gold medal" (P146).

It must be noted, however, that taking time to develop trusting relationships and focus on incremental training goals may be more or less difficult for elite riders depending on a number of contextual factors. Elisa was fortunate enough to have control over Arrow's training as his legal owner; many other participants did not have this level of control or autonomy in their relationships with horses. Organisational factors also shape horse-rider relationships, with Georgina describing her frustration at being obligated to push a horse to complete a competition because of the pressure associated with competing as a team of riders and representing one's country:

> …I'll never forget…you know, this "team thing" is wrong for eventing, you should not have to get back on your horse when you feel he's already done enough (P134).

Lucy had experienced a similar phenomenon whilst competing at two major three-day event championships. On both occasions she knew her horse was not well enough to compete, but felt she had no choice but to continue, an experience that continued to nag at her years later:

> I had to push him to do stuff that he wasn't, that he shouldn't be doing when he was sick and you know, it still grates...but he had to, you're in a team, so you have to do it, if I wasn't in a team, both times, I would have pulled up (P130).

A sense of corporate responsibility is also evident in Mark Todd's (2012) second autobiography. He writes "in those days, it was all about 'for the sake of the team'….if your horse was still upright, and you hadn't actually lost a limb, you were expected to keep going" (p. 15). Similarly, Pippa Funnell (2005) describes how her legendary, much-loved horse, Sir Barnaby, once fell at the last fence of a steeplechase course and "just lay there" (p. 26). Funnell describes the "huge telling-off" (p. 26) she received from the selectors for letting down the team by deciding not to complete the course. Para-equestrian, Tegan, described her concern at the growing impetus to prioritise performance over the relationship between horse and rider and horse welfare, stating:

> I think we're unfortunately we're gonna, we'll see horses get pushed to places they shouldn't be…we all started this for fun...at one point (participant laughs)…cos we liked, loved horses and loved riding with a passion for it, and

> I really I hope, that, that becomes a priority for more and more international riders (P142).

Although a clear dichotomy between the professional and personal dimensions of horse-rider relationships in elite sport appeared to exist in participants' narratives, these dynamics are not inevitably oppositional. Whilst the demands of riding professionally in an elite context and the commodification of horses may place pressure on the personal relationship between horse and rider, many participants appeared able to juggle both personal and professional concerns, though this required conscious effort. Finally, as well as enabling equestrian athletes to achieve remarkable professional success, being around horses also carried restorative effects, which in some cases offset the pressure associated with being an elite competitor, or in the case of para-equestrian, Kate, the stress associated with daily life:

> I know horses, I wouldn't be alive without them, that bond and umm they help me get up in the morning when I'm in pain and I've had a really crappy day… they help me get moving…mentally they help keep me sane (P141).

Some participants viewed equestrian sport as "about doing your job properly" (P129), yet others saw performance outcomes as peripheral to the meaning associated with the horse-rider relationship, with Jim assuring me that even "the toughest" of equestrian athletes "honour" the horse-rider relationship "above everything else" (P110), though other participants endorsed different views about their fellow competitors.

6.3.1 Code: Experiencing Complex, Intimate Relationships with Horses

Managing personal-professional relationships with elite sport horses' meant navigating a complex interspecies relationship, something participants explored in context to communication, conflict, and emotional exchanges between horse and rider. Communication between horse and rider was intimately personal in its physicality; as Jane puts it, "it's all about the body language…they can't see what you're doing on their back, they can only feel it, so it's very very personal" (P107). Where a relationship had been established, communicating with horses was sometimes easier than communicating with humans, because as dressage rider, Heidi noted, horse-rider relationships are devoid of "emotional baggage" and "preconceived notions" (P133). Horse-rider communication presented other challenges, though, as Matthew notes:

> We're having an interview here and I'm using lots of words to try and get the gist of what I think, we've [horse and rider] gotta do that without words, so [to] try and have this conversation where you just poke me, is pretty hard (P111).

Accessing and understanding the equine psyche represented an additional challenge, as Melissa describes:

> You can't actually physically get an answer from them, you can't say, "How are you feeling today?" "Yeah, really awful, thanks for asking, leave me alone!." They put their ears back at you and that could be "I'm hungry" or "I'm actually sore"…just to be able to communicate…and to read the horses...it all sounds so easy but it isn't and it takes years to learn a horse. (P109).

Communication between horse and rider represented a continuous stream of micro-level exchange, particularly where a close relationship existed, with precise acts of communication conveying confidence and creating mental rhythms that translated into physical synergy between horse and rider. Jim described this "stream" of communication as a complex blend of aggression, precision, intensity, and subtlety:

> You've got to try and allow them [horses] to keep thinking with great confidence and with a great rhythm and a stream, that's how I describe it, for want of a better word, and I use that a lot when I'm coaching, again because I don't recognise any other words in the English language that can go after that and I think that's what these more advanced worlds are all about, getting into territory which was never designed for the English language, you know. We're dealing with sensibilities or awarenesses that would normally go beneath a normal person's sensibilities…as you become more and more focused you become aware of worlds and worlds within worlds (P110).

Interspecies communication requires mindfulness and "a beautiful synergy between psychology and physiology" (P110), with both mind and body engaged in horse-rider communication. As Lara describes, communion between horse and rider may arise even during the most challenging phases of an endurance race:

> Usually there's a wall at around a mile eighty, both of you, usually the horse hits the wall earlier and you have to be able to carry him through, and while the human hits their own wall, the horse needs to carry its rider through and

> sometimes you don't see that on the trail. You see the rider give up and the horse reads on that and "Okay, time to quit, I'm tired too, so..." and the ideal one is the horse that says, "Well you carried me through my wall so I'll just keep going for you and we'll make it home eventually" (P132).

In keeping with Jim's sentiments, part of the sensing between horse and rider that Lara describes may be difficult to explain using language. Interestingly, Jane initially believed anything other than physical horse-rider communication belonged to the domain of "fish slappers" (P107), however, being exposed to the mental synchrony between para-equestrian dyads led Jane to rethink her position and consider the validity of more intuitive forms of interspecies communication. Georgina also highlighted the esoteric dimensions of horse-rider communication, highlighting the sensitivity of horses to aspects of life beyond ordinary awareness:

> The horse can pick up your thoughts, that's why you have to be so right in your mind, he can pick up your negativity, he can pick up your fear, there's amazing stories about horses picking up...vibes in the air…they are unbelievably sensitive to situations, they can't talk...so from my mind they have a whole other dimension so they, they pick up things that you and I, because we can talk and shout and scream, completely miss, they pick up (P134).

Not all participants viewed horse-rider communication in these terms, however, with Heidi emphasizing simplicity and basic learning cues over more abstruse ways of thinking about horse-rider communication. According to Kelly, the complexity of horse-rider communication existed on a trajectory ranging from simple to sophisticated that at its peak, constituted a "language of feel" (P117):

> To me it's like a conversation, that when you start off it's like a conversation that you would have with a toddler, that's very simple instructions and easy to understand and then it becomes more sophisticated as the training goes along until, in the end at Grand Prix, there'll be times where, I mean it will appear like it's telepathic but it isn't, but they will respond to the slightest aide but it's only through developing…literally, the language of feel (P117).

Kelly described the communication that occurred between her and her horse during one of her most memorable sporting moments as "thoughtless" (P117), intensely complex

yet produced without a sense of effort. Other participants described their mental state at such moments as akin to a state of mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003), an embodiment of "relaxed concentration" (Burgon, 2013) in which horse and rider are so closely connected that participants described having to be careful to school their thoughts, as Ellen noted, lest the horse should respond before being asked. Participant narratives suggested that the professional, work-oriented context in which elite dyads interacted may be key to the development of such intensely experienced, personal communicative exchanges between horse and rider.

Emotional exchanges, or a lack thereof, directly influenced whether participants perceived their relationships with horses as predominantly professional or personal in nature. Participants experienced strong emotions, or in some cases, a lack thereof, toward horses, reflecting the continuum on which elite horse-rider relationships exist. For many participants, experiencing emotion was unavoidable, arose out of joint sporting action, and was a part of enjoying sport. Horses also had the capacity to serve as emotional buffers during difficult life experiences, evidenced in Ellie's depiction of a horse whose presence helped her cope with being bullied, "Every afternoon, he'll be there waiting for me, and he didn't complain or anything, all he wanted was love and attention, no back-stabbing or gossiping or anything!" (P131). Regardless of the personal-professional emphasis of each individual horse-rider relationship, one attribute critical to functioning effectively as a sporting dyad was the ability to feel empathy toward horses. A lack of empathy, as Melissa describes, could dramatically affect sporting performance:

> When she [rider] goes into the ring, they [horses] don't try for her because they're scared to be in the ring and she just can't...mentally she can't click with that at all. …she's one of those riders who just pushes it and is so driven by success and so driven by results, "if there's no results it's no fun" (P109).

While a lack of emotion toward sporting outcomes and horses may be associated with objectivity and professionalism, a lack of empathy was antithetical to the horse-rider relationship, and something that could dramatically limit the scope of dyadic performances because of the lack of resilience and trust that defines relationships devoid of empathy. Strong negative emotions were also seen as detrimental to the horse-rider relationship, as Diana describes:

> That was the problem when I went to here, my horse died…and I was only crying, crying, crying, and that was not too good for Nero…I think if you're happy and you're calm and you're umm er, satisfied with yourself, with your horses, with what you do, they see it, and I think that's very good for them (P124).

Working with horses had the potential to create strong emotions that must be managed to interact responsibly with horses, while repeated sporting setbacks made emotional control particularly central to successful relationships, as Amelia describes:

> It's very easy to get frustrated, and in any other sport you can sort of take out your frustrations on yourself but umm the worst thing you can do is take out a frustration on the horse which is, sounds awful, but it's an easy thing to do, the horse is right there, it's easy to just give it a jab in the mouth before you even realise what you're doing and everyone would like to think that they're not like that but I think a lot of people are…I think you need to be ambitious and things but you need to be very disciplined in controlling your own emotions (P119).

A number of participants described the death of a horse with whom they had competed and shared a strong bond. A dedicated competitor and coach, Jane had taken a year away from equestrian sports after the unexpected death of her competition mare, Molly. Noting how Jane's professional and personal life revolved around horses brought home to me the significance of her decision to step away from horses and the sport after Molly's death, while Diana and Natalie both cried during interviews after referring to the death of a former horse.

Participants formed emotionally close relationships with a broad range of horses, suggesting first, that elite riders work and successfully form relationships with a variety of horses and, second, that emotional attachment may develop in the absence of an affection-based relationship. Jane described her relationship with her elite horse, Fred as one of "very, very close friends," while her relationship with Molly was "a very clear working relationship" (P107) because Molly preferred a less affectionate relationship, was independent, and had "strong opinions" (P107). Regardless of this, Jane had experienced a strong emotional attachment to both horses. Diana had also competed at an elite level with two horses with whom she experienced very different relationships, one who was highly affectionate, with the other preferring to be left alone; while Kelly reported building a

strong, trusting partnership with a horse that she did not like and that did not like her, further illustrating the complexity of the relationship between horse and rider in a sporting context.

Performing at an elite level and being in synchronicity with a horse evoked deep emotions in participants, whether the performance occurred in a competitive context or not. Val described a dressage test with Moss in which at the completion of the test, "My adrenaline was just absolutely, he was fantastic, we were dancing" (P108). Val's joy as she recounted this experience was palpable. Of all the emotional exchanges that may occur between horse and rider, a sense of being complete with the horse, in the moment and in harmony, was a transcendent experience that drew participants to horses and to equestrian sport. These findings suggest that harmonious relationships with horses may elicit a sense of mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003), while participants appear to experience deep, immediate, and emotional connections with horses, just as those in other areas of equestrianism, such as natural horsemanship (Egan, 2012), have reported.

Conflict was a natural product of the complex and nuanced relationship between horse and rider, nonetheless, the impact of conflict on horse-rider dyads, either physical or psychological in nature, differed considerably. For some participants, conflict was against the rules of their sport and therefore inherently negative, but could still be purposeful in other ways. For other participants, such as Hannah, conflict meant an inefficient use of energy and detracted from her enjoyment of equestrian sport. Conflict was also conceived as a way of learning about the horse and the horse-rider relationship. A processual understanding of conflict implied that horse-rider interaction could shift from challenge to harmony and back again without necessarily having a negative impact on the relationship. Rather than idealising cohesion, Kelly described how "animated discussion" (P117) could help to develop a partnership. Although she personally disliked conflict and saw the "ultimate aim" of horse rider interaction as "harmony" (P117), she was aware of the purpose friction could serve:

> I think it ahh umm you maybe learn more about yourself and learn more about the horse [through conflict]....We had an interesting clinic in [city name]… [name] who is a Dutch judge and he was saying sometimes when things go wrong you actually see more what the horse can do, what his potential is…I think if you only go for harmony you maybe avoid knowing what your maximum potential is (P117).

Participants described finding ways of managing conflict and understanding its implications that involved recognising one's responsibility to behave fairly toward horses. This was something Val reflected on after getting into a power struggle with Moss that ended with him "in a white sweat" and Val with "blisters, and neither of us had achieved anything" (P108). Being honest and fair implied a certain ethical and moral stance toward horses as animals, sporting partners, and individuals. Maturity and experience also increased participants' tolerance and flexibility toward horses. Confidence in one's own ability and knowledge of the horse's nature created a more tolerant, permissive, and trusting relationship. Amelia and Melissa both described the process of learning to take horses as they are, even if this meant tolerating unusual behaviour patterns and having the confidence to ask less rather than more, as Amelia describes:

> It takes a long time to...trust yourself enough, but sometimes I'm like, 'This is the best that he's going to do today. It feels like if I wanted to now, I could go on and do some big trot, and because he's given me that feeling, I'm gonna leave it there' (P119).

It struck me as I reflected on my interview with Amelia that being a well-known athlete may make it more challenging to listen to horses. Once one is expected to perform well, the pressure of performing according to other's expectations may increase, making it harder to focus on the dialogue between horse and rider. This pressure may increase as coaches, team-mates, owners, team officials, and even the sporting reputation of one's country, are implicated in a dyad's performance. As the competitive environment becomes more pressured, a rider may become increasingly conscious of what is expected of them, and what is expected may not always align with the horse's needs. Although she strove for professional perfection, Amelia tried to balance this with listening to her horse and giving him control over their work schedule:

> Now that I know the horse well enough I've got to let him dictate what the session's gonna be, and don't get me wrong, he doesn't get away with anything, like there's not a single transition that can be less than perfect, like the quality of the work has to be really good, but…the way he's feeling is going to dictate how the session [is run] (P119).

I sensed Amelia's increasing confidence as a rider had been critical to her ability to shift from a managerial stance toward horses to one of shared power and dialogue, with

reciprocal benefits for both partners. Bringing together the complexity of emotion, communication, and conflict, participants spoke of the emotional ramifications of conflict on horse and rider and how conflict could emerge out of an impasse in communication. A lack of clarity in moments of physical and mental stress could disrupt the flow of interaction between horse and rider. Jim's coaching activities had sensitized him to the problems that develop when young riders respond aggressively toward perceived "disobedience" in the horse, referring in particular to young riders who "lose sanity." I asked him to describe what he defined as "sanity":

> Umm you know… "Naughty boy, smack." Well you can't ever do that at the top you know, the horses are already trying. Sometimes you'll get a horse that's scared, he'll get a fright and the easy thing is to smack them. Oh Jesus, you can't smack even a person for being frightened but you know they go, "Oh but he was naughty" and you go, "Oh well that was such a Neanderthal interpretation of the horse not doing what you wanted him to do, he wasn't naughty, he got scared." ….and then they go, "Oh yeah, well…" When it's all pointed out they can see it, but that's an incredible clarity and sanity that has to be there all the time and the kids are still too emotional umm and so make mistakes with that (P110).

Jim's description of sanity highlights the negative effects emotionality may have for horse-rider relationships, particularly given the immediacy and physicality of communication between horse and rider. As Jane put it, "If you've said something rude to a horse you can't take it back" (P107). Ironically, conflict could lead to a close horse-rider relationship because of the time, energy and thought applied to a difficult horse, provided the horse's ability warranted the effort required. Melissa described an almost agonisingly lengthy period of time in which her life rotated around trying to resolve difficulties with a horse that she would go on to win an Olympic medal with, a horse with whom she shares a deep personal relationship:

> He is the hardest horse I have ever had on the flat, like just it has been a nightmare…it just took me and him years to just, slowly nut it out and now even at home, I can ride him at home and he can make a mistake or he can be a bit cranky that day, I do not take him [on], I do not try and fix it because I know it is not gonna happen [at a competition] (P109).

Similarly, Georgina referred to a horse she had that "came biting and kicking and he left biting and kicking," noting, "that's more difficult to love, but it's even more fun when they do just give you ten seconds of their time because you've thawed them for a little tiny moment" (P134). Patrick also laughingly told me that his vaulting horse Noddy regularly bites him and occasionally bucks during competition, yet this did not appear to affect Patrick's trust, or love and affection for the horse. Participant narratives suggested that personally close and professionally successful horse-rider relationships can and do exist in the presence of interpersonal conflict. Horses that bring a certain degree of manageable challenge may be highly valued on a personal level, and in a number of cases in the current study, a difficult horse also paid competitive dividends.

6.3.2 Code: Interdependency and Vulnerability in Horse-Rider Relationships

The following code illustrates how horse-rider relationships are interdependent, creating psychological, professional, and physical vulnerability experienced by riders within the horse-rider relationship. In simple terms, participants described how horse and rider need each other to participate in equestrian sports. As Kelly puts it, "You rely on each other…the rider cannot do it without the horse and the horse can't do it without the rider" (P117), however, participants were aware that, unlike other sporting dyads, there was a non-mutual investment in sporting outcomes. Despite this, participants drew on a narrative of mutual engagement and interdependence, with some even arguing that horses invest to some extent in sporting activities. In establishing mutual dependency, participants outlined the physical "needs" of the horse and the competitive "needs" of the rider, evidenced in the following quote by Patrick:

> He [horse] isn't self-sufficient, you're, you're looking after him, so you take, like as much as he's the one that does everything for you when you're on him, you have to do everything for him when you're not (P145).

Participants also commonly drew on equine management and care in developing constructions of mutual dependence (Rusbult & Arriaga, 2000), with Georgina describing how a sense of reciprocity between horse and rider could be engendered by going to "the nth degree," creating "the feeling that you're doing everything you can to help them and they give you something back" (P134). Dyads also shared a mutual need for emotional and

physical safety, with participants describing a mutual need for social interaction. Horses may be seen as socially as well as physically dependent on the rider if they do, in fact, desire social affiliation, while the horse may be seen as vulnerable in its inability to control the competitive environment or the tasks that are asked of it, with a willingness to act in accordance with human desires leaving the horse susceptible to exploitation. Tegan spoke about equine vulnerability with reference to Tokito, a horse she described as "very sensitive [and] fragile…that lacked a lotta confidence and lacked some independence." Tokito's vulnerability increased as his relationship with Tegan developed:

> I could not do anything wrong, *I could not do anything wrong*, and umm and I would try and watch myself around him a little bit because of that, I knew he was such a good (pause) soul and all he wanted to do was please me so…he was the horse who taught me how to not get frustrated with horses (P142).

In their desire to achieve competitive success, participants were also vulnerable. The professional status of an elite rider is only partially within their control, as Melissa described it, "You can't exist without the other, like I can be hugely successful now, but without another horse I'm just a rider watching from the outside" (P109). Participants were professionally dependent on horses, and the greater their investment in equestrian sport, the greater their need for success, and subsequent vulnerability. Physical vulnerability also held professional and psychological implications for equestrian athletes. Both horse and rider may die or be seriously injured in equestrian sport, as Matthew states, "It's an animal that could kill you…it's a dangerous sport if something goes wrong, you can get hurt badly" (P111).

Feeling a horse's power, physical or otherwise, may have a profound effect on the way the relationship between horse and rider is experienced. Para-equestrians, for whom physical vulnerability may be particularly relevant, drew upon narratives of power, mutual care, and dependence in understanding horse-rider relationships. Amy told me how while hand-grazing one of her horses from her wheelchair, it had started to rain, causing the wheels of Amy's aged wheelchair to start spinning, preventing her from moving. As the storm approached and Amy struggled to gain traction, the horse began to act:

> He kinda looked back at me and he just kinda stared at me for a minute and then put his head down and he pulled me into the barn, and he'd never pulled me anywhere, he'd always been very patient with me being slow and he'd take

> a few steps and wait on me to catch up and he'd take a few steps and wait a few steps, but that one time I couldn't get traction he put his head down and pulled me all the way, so I mean...it was very, smart…he took really good care of me (P143).

Finally, those who formed deeply personal relationships with horses faced an added degree of vulnerability. Participants who shared close bonds with their horses were in some cases particularly fearful about injuring or seeing their horses die because of sporting pursuits, while emotional attachment increased a rider's vulnerability and sense of loss should his or her horse be sold or transferred to another rider. Drawing on a narrative of mutual care appeared to represent a protective mechanism that enabled participants to face the challenging feats of equestrian sport despite these fears, while viewing the horse-rider relationship as interdependent may also provide an antidote to physical and psychological sporting risks.

6.4 Discussion of Findings

The horse-rider relationship and the sporting context in which it exists are replete with tensions and contradictions that require careful consideration. Participants' demonstrated high levels of commitment to equestrian sport and were typically deeply engaged in their relationships with horses; they also experienced significant pressure to be commercially successful (Dashper, 2015). Hoyes (as cited by Collins, 2006) notes that the pressure to earn money as an elite rider can minimise the art of riding and maximise the business of it, noting how elite riders may over time become "sales riders" (p. 70). Elite equestrians are a heterogeneous cohort, however, and not all participants in this study rode professionally or were reliant on third-party owners, in keeping with reports that in countries such as Australia, many elite riders still own their own horses (Equestrian Life, 2013). A number of participants worked between ten and thirty horses a day, while some had only worked with their current competition horse(s) for a short period. As Dashper (2015) points out, strong horse-rider relationships fostered over time may be the ideal, but are not necessarily achievable given the time constraints around which elite riders are expected to achieve success.

Many participants lived near their horses and in keeping with research by Dashper (2012) on professional equestrians, made significant time commitments to equestrianism, often prioritising other aspects of life around horses and sport. Participants enjoyed

interacting with horses, yet some clearly struggled to remain emotionally engaged with horses and sporting achievements. As Dashper (2012), highlights, as well as carrying obvious benefits, living in close proximity to horses can create difficulties separating leisure and work time, and once equestrian sport becomes one's work, friction may develop between the personal and professional dimensions of the horse-rider relationship. Participants were drawn to equestrian sports because of their fascination with horses, but in the process of assuming a professional riding identity, sometimes struggled to maintain a balance between caring for and working with horses. The challenge of managing personal-professional relationships with horses supports the findings of Dashper's (2014) research on elite equestrian riders, in which pressure to be successful did not always align with an emphasis on creating trusting horse-rider relationships, bringing into question the influence of sporting culture on horse-rider relationships.

These findings suggest horse-rider interaction is utilitarian and professional, affection-based and social, and perhaps uniquely, neither entirely one nor the other. Just as previous research has captured a sense of ambivalence in human-animal relationships (Serpell, 1996b; Arluke & Sanders, 1996), a contradiction may exist between the profound affinity and attachment between horse and rider and the profit-based "use" of horses in sport (McLean & McGreevy, 2010a). A tension between what Midgley (1994) describes as the contradictory combination of "reverence…mutual trust" and "brutal exploitation" (p. 193) emerged in the narratives of a number of participants. Similarly to pet-human relationships (cf. Fox, 2006), but in more work-oriented ways, horses were valued by participants, and as will be discussed in the next chapter, accorded minds, but they could also be discarded if or when they no longer performed to a certain competitive standard. Moreover, while participants emphasized the importance of developing strong relationships over time, a number of participants were successfully engaged in "fast-track" (P138) horse-rider relationships.

Developing close interpersonal horse-rider relationships may be harder to do and less clearly valued at the highest echelons of competitive equestrian sport (Dashper, 2015) with an increasingly "output focused" (Dashper, 2014, p. 353) elite milieu at odds with the development of strong, horse-rider relationships. The findings of this study suggest that increasing commercial influences in elite sport may encourage an instrumental approach toward horses (Dashper, 2014), yet caring for, managing, and competing horses may lead to strong horse-rider bonds, providing support for the notion that horse-rider relationships may shift between personal and professional interactional modes, as has been found with

respect to other interspecies relationships (Arluke, 1994). Participants engaged with horses across temporally distinct periods, transitioning from the leisure-based amateur context to the elite context, where a more uncertain combination of social dynamics may exist. Participants were also required to form relationships with multiple horses to sustain their equestrian careers, while equestrian sport was a form of work for many athletes, in keeping with the pragmatic, goal-oriented origins of horse-human interaction (Borton, 1990; Bryant, 2008). Yet equestrian sport is commonly defined, in the media and by riders themselves (cf. King, 1998; Palmer, 1982; Rolton, 2001) according to notable dyads (i.e. John Whitaker and Milton, Isabell Werth and Gigolo, and Mark Todd and Charisma). This may create a romanticised image of horse-rider relationships that does not necessarily reflect the reality of the elite equestrian milieu and means that elite riders who emphasize a professional orientation toward horses may be seen as contravening attachment-based expectations of horse-human relationships (Felando, 2014; Bryant, 2008; Shaw, 2013).

Recent commentary on the horse racing industry suggests that when a horse dies, a corporate sense of responsibility emerges, with horse owners, the racing fraternity, the public, and racing jockeys all seen as contributing to the horse's fate (cf. Ninemsn, 2014; News Limited, 2014; Wainwright, 2014). In addition, it is generally accepted that the horse-jockey relationship is of a more commercial nature than that between horse and rider in equestrian sport. As champion showjumper, Beezie Madden (as cited by Caple, 2012) states, racing jockeys, "…have to know the horse a little bit, but they don't really train their horses or live with their horses, as far as the jockeys go, they get on for the race and they go." In contrast, the findings of this study suggest that elite riders train and often live in close proximity to their horses, and experience close relationships with them. Equestrian athletes are often also seen as directly responsible for the welfare of their horses, evident in the condemnation of American eventer, Amy Tryon for failing to recognise that her horse had sustained a fatal injury during the cross-country phase of the Rolex Kentucky CCI in 2007 (Rasin, 2007), and the somewhat ambivalent response towards British eventer Harry Meade on social media after his horse, Wild Lone, died shortly after completing the cross-country phase of the World Equestrian Games at Normandy in 2014.

Whether equestrian athletes are in fact more or less culpable for the death or injury of their horses than are racing jockeys, it is notable that public perceptions of equestrian sports tend to differ from that of jumps- and flat-racing, with the horse-rider relationship often held as fundamental to equestrian sport (cf. Heuschmann, 2011; Pretty & Bridgeman, 2005), but treated more ambiguously with respect to racing sports. Relevant to this

conversation is the contested status of horses in sport. As Wilkie (2010) notes, we are quick to condemn those who abuse pets, but different moral values apply to the more utilitarian relationship between humans and farm animals. Similarly, our expectations of horse-human relationships may differ markedly across contexts. It is easy, and perhaps appropriate to attribute responsibility to equestrian athletes for upholding the welfare of their horses, yet it is also important to consider structures and the role of sporting culture in shaping horse-rider interaction. As Arluke (1994) notes, assumptions about animals are built into institutional paradigms and may readily enculturate us into certain ways of relating to animals. In addition, Hickey and Kelly (2008) note that athletic identities are formed within a broader milieu of industry expectations, with the "commercialised and professionalised world of elite sport" (p. 477) conveying a set of expectations for athlete behaviour. The findings of this study suggest that in some contexts, equestrian sport rewards a pragmatic approach to horse-human interaction, enabling participants to be competitive in choosing horses and resilient in the loss of a horse. Though equestrian sports appear less driven by financial prerogatives than the jumps and flat racing industry (Allin, 2011), the elite sporting context creates considerable pressure to perform consistently well, especially once established as a high-level rider.

The findings of this study suggest that emotionally distancing oneself from horses may occur in response to certain aspects of equestrian sporting culture that reinforce detachment as an appropriate way of relating to horses and succeeding competitively. Female participants in particular were aware of the politics underlying close attachments to horses, with some criticised for becoming too emotionally involved with horses. Brandt (2005) describes how narratives around men's relationships with horses emphasize labour, functionality, and performance, reinforcing the "expert ability" (p. 5) of men and furthering the notion that equestrian performances are achieved through talent and training, all of which serves to legitimize equestrianism as a masculine sport. Maintaining emotional distance from horses may reinforce a professional identity that centres on masculinity and a performance-orientation to sport, an identity both male and female riders may be encouraged to emulate. Yet many participants described relationships that were imbued with an emotion that enriched their sporting experience, even if this had the potential to compromise their detachment and make them professionally and personally vulnerable.

In his research on emotion management in animal shelter employees, Arluke (1994) notes that employee's thoughts and feelings toward animals did not shift dramatically as they began to euthanize animals; rather participants developed coping mechanisms

oriented around maintaining feelings of "attachment, empathy and loss" (p. 146), allowing them to continue to identify with a self that cared about animals. In a similar vein, participants in the current study emphasized the need to remain empathic and emotionally connected to horses and to sporting outcomes, even though this could become difficult over an extended career with horses. Interestingly, closeness and distance in relationships has been found to reflect different aspects of affiliation, rather than simply reflecting the antithesis of each other, while as Hess et al., (2007) argue, most long-term relationships at some point involve attempts to achieve distance and closeness. In addition, Charles and Davies (2008) describe how their participants used humour to broach the topic of relationships with pet animals, aware that too strong an attachment may be negatively viewed, perhaps because, as numerous authors have noted (cf. Brandt, 2005; Charles & Davies, 2008), close interpersonal relationships with animals have been labelled in numerous derogatory ways.

The process of managing professional interests without jeopardising personal relationships with horses may be facilitated by spending time with horses away from training and performance-oriented activities, while maintaining a life outside of sport and horses may help to create balance and equilibrium, a view supported by author and equestrian enthusiast, Julie Whitaker (Whitaker & Whitelaw, 2007). Although many riders espouse the need to make a full-time, intensive commitment to working with horses in order to be successful (cf. Fox-Pitt, 2009), and in many instances such commitment appears the only means of being a successful elite athlete (Petitpas, Danish, McKelvain, & Murphy, 1992), research suggests that pursuing career/education related goals separate to one's sporting pursuits while remaining active as an elite competitor may enhance one's sporting performance (Australian Sports Commission, 2003 as cited by Hickey & Kelly, 2008). Furthermore, research conducted by Durand-Bush and Salmela (2002) on high-performing elite athletes found that education and post-secondary school study was prized by athletes as an additional aspect of their lives, supporting the notion that dual engagement in sporting and non-sporting activities may be both feasible and beneficial. Equestrian sport may thus benefit from an analysis of ways of supporting athletes to maintain interests, professional and personal, outside of sport and horses.

Participants described communication between horse and rider as fundamental to the quality of the horse-rider relationship, providing support for research by Wipper (2000) and McKernan (2003). Physical synchronicity (cf. Argent, 2012) between horse and rider may result in psychological experiences of flow, defined as complete immersion in an

activity that involves both action and awareness, high levels of concentration and a loss of self-awareness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1975/2000; Jackson, 1992). In her research on elite figure skaters, Jackson (1992) identified partner unity as an important pre-requisite of flow, with participants describing experiences of flow that differed from the experiences of athletes in individual sports. Participants in the current study described effortless, telepathic communication between horse and rider, and linked this to performance outcomes, in keeping with Jackson's (1992) contention that both performance and the experiential components of sport may be enhanced by flow. Participants described how interactional synchrony heightened rapport between horse and rider, with both factors serving as motivators for their sporting participation (Athos & Gabarro, 1978).

Given that a range of research suggests a relatively high level of sporting ability is implicated in the experience of flow (Jackson, 1995; Jackson & Roberts, 1992; Jackson, Kimiecik, Ford, & Marsh, 1998; Stein, Kimiecik, Daniels, & Jackson, 1995), and that a certain degree of sporting challenge (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamurra, 1989) is also facilitative of flow, this experiential state may be particularly relevant to the sporting experiences of elite equestrian athletes. The findings of the current study, coupled with Jackson's (1992) research on figure skaters, suggest that communication and emotion between sporting partners may be critical to flow experiences in dyadic sports. Further to this, given the relevance of anxiety (cf. Tenenbaum et al., 2002) to equestrian sports, and support for the notion that elite equestrians demonstrate better anxiety-management and concentration skills than their less successful counterparts (Meyers, Bourgeois, LeUnes, & Murray, 1999), it may be that training riders to manage their emotions (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2011) may increase the chances of achieving a flow state, particularly as anxiety may be detrimental to flow experiences (Jackson et al., 1998).

The physical and mental synchronicity participants described having experienced with horses supports extant evidence of physical synchronicity (Argent, 2012) and cross-species embodiment in horse-human dyads (Game, 2001). As well as serving as a form of communication, these findings suggest physical contact between horse and rider may be a catalyst for developing close relationships, as well as the product of them (Schlosser, 2012). Moreover, in keeping with Brandt's (2005) argument that "body language" (p. 63) between horse and rider develops in complexity over time, a number of participants described the gradual development of their communicative acts toward horses, until this communication reached a point of seamlessness. This suggests a high degree of connectedness may be achieved between horse and rider (Keaveney, 2008), while research

by Wolframm and Ottersky (2013) has found that elite riders tend to demonstrate higher levels of automaticity with respect to their riding skills than do lower-level riders. An emphasis on well-honed communication in this study also provides support for the argument that effective communication impacts directly on the functioning of sporting teams (Carron & Hausenblas, 1998) and may be experienced in the absence of conscious thought (Wolframm & Ottersky, 2013).

Participants' relationships with horses were influenced by emotion in diverse ways, highlighting the need to manage emotions around horses, as well as the depth of emotions that undergird relationships with horses. The immediacy of physical communication between horse and rider meant that horse and rider may be able to perceive nuanced changes in the emotional state of the other, while conflict management in interspecies dyads may rely upon a rider's ability to manage emotions effectively (Latimer, Rench, & Brackett, 2007). The emphasis on emotion control supports research by Coulter (2013) on showjumping riders, in which managing and even repressing emotion occurred, as well as research findings on emotional regulation in cricket team players (Totterdell & Leach, 2001). Managing emotions did not mean that emotions were not experienced between horse and rider; in keeping with research by Smart (2011), participants described experiencing joy and disappointment, while similar to hobby riders in Birke's (2007) research, they also expressed deep affection for horses, often describing interaction with horses as the most meaningful part of their lives.

Emotion in sport has historically occupied a liminal position, with cognitive processes commonly conceived as more important to sporting outcomes (Hays, 2012). Emotions have also been considered a source of irrationality, and an impediment to rational thinking (Berenson, 1987), yet they continue to constitute a dominant dimension of social relationships (Guerrero & Andersen, 2000). Given the emotionality that underscored the relationships participants experienced with horses, it is not surprising that complex, intimate exchanges between horse and rider played a significant role in shaping horse-rider relationships. Although emotion management did occur, participants described strong feelings for horses, something Guerrero et al., (2007) links to the quality and depth of social relationships. Given this, it may be that emotional intelligence (Salovey, Mayer, & Caruso, 2002) is particularly relevant to equestrian sport, supporting the contentions of a number of researchers with respect to other sports (cf. Botterill & Brown, 2002; Gordon, 2003; McCann, 1999; Sinden, 2014) and corroborating the findings of research conducted on emotion in combat sports (Szabo & Urbán, 2014), baseball teams (Zizzi, Deaner,

Hirschhorn, 2003), and ultra-endurance runners (Lane & Wilson, 2011). This finding also adds strength to Rapisarda's (2002) contention that emotional intelligence may explain enhanced cohesion in work teams. Furthermore, while emotional resilience may be critical for many athletic populations, it may be particularly salient for equestrian athletes given the receptivity of horses to emotions (Wipper, 2000).

For male equestrians, experiencing emotion in relationships with horses may be more complex than for females given the potential for such experiences to disturb images of performance-oriented masculinity (Graysmith, 2008; Marini, 1988). Nevertheless, a number of male participants provided emotional portraits of their horse-rider relationships, though they were careful to dissociate from images of homosexuality or inferences of a subverted masculinity, while other male participants presented a more detached picture of their relationships with horses. It is important not to over-dichotomise gender dynamics in equestrian sport and their influence on horse-rider interaction. Thompson and Adelman (2013) argue that both male and female equestrian sporting participants negotiate gender stereotypes, conforming to and defying "the status quo" (p. 195), in the process. Finally, participants described how emotional control developed with age, a finding that supports research by Wolframm and Ottersky (2013) in which a strong positive correlation between number of years of riding and emotional control was identified, supporting the notion that older equestrians may be a uniquely competitive cohort (Kiger, 2012). Given that managing emotions and sporting setbacks may be critical to working effectively with horses, equestrian athletes may benefit from training in emotional resilience to hone their "emotional fitness" as outlined by Algoe and Fredrickson (2011) with respect to military personnel.

Participants described conflict as a natural dimension of the relationships they experienced with horses, in keeping with the contention that conflict is a ubiquitous part of interpersonal relationships (Canary & Messman, 2000). As Laursen (1993) notes, the higher the interdependence of the relationship, the greater the likelihood for conflict, as shared goals and behaviours create opportunities for conflict to arise, while closeness allows partners to express their dissatisfaction. Participants described becoming more tolerant and permissive with horses as their relationships developed, with conflict not necessarily causing the same reaction as it might in weaker horse-rider relationships. This provides support for the argument that the impact of conflict in relationships may differ as a function of the closeness of the relationship (Hartup & Laursen, 1993; Surra & Longstreth, 1990).

Participants expressed a nuanced understanding of the consequences of horse-rider conflict. Within certain boundaries, conflict could represent a way of learning more about a horse and one's relationship with it, and could constitute part of the challenge of equestrian sports. Presuming the horse's talent warranted the effort, prolonged efforts to resolve conflict often inadvertently created stronger relationships with more time spent with difficult horses. Some amount of manageable or constructive conflict (Laursen & Hafen, 2010) appeared facilitative of the development of close interpersonal horse-rider relationships, in keeping with the contentions of Rusbult and van Lange (2003) and Laursen (1993). Finally, conflict resolution was closely linked to communication (Porter-O'Grady, 2004), while the findings of the study support past research indicating that dressage riders are particularly aware of harmony and its visible effect on performance outcomes, with physical appearances of harmony less valued in sports such as eventing (Bridgeman, 2009).

Interdependency may be understood as a key feature of horse-rider relationships (Kelley et al., 1983), particularly given the potential closeness of horse-rider relationships and Prager's (2000) suggestion that interdependency and intimacy are intrinsically linked. Horse-rider relationships were tempered by a combination of security and uncertainty, in keeping with the argument that vulnerability and dependency are closely linked in social relationships (Rusbult & van Lange, 2003), and that intimacy is itself a form of social risk (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Prager, 1995). Participants were dependent on their horse's fitness, well-being, cooperation, and talent to succeed professionally, while horses were conceived as dependent on humans for physical care. Asymmetries were evident in this interdependency (Berscheid, 1985), with participants aware that they exerted greater control over decision-making and resource allocation than did their horses (Rusbult, Kumashiro, Coolsen, & Kirchner, 2004).

6.5 Summary

This chapter has addressed the professional-personal dimensions of horse-rider relationships in elite sport, with attention to the contextual details of participants' lives, and how horse-rider relationships are constructed and managed by equestrian athletes. Participants' experienced intimate, complex relationships with horses that rotated around communicative, emotional, and conflict-based social exchanges between horse and rider. Interdependency and vulnerability also

characterised participants' understandings of horse-rider interaction, leading to a discussion in the following chapter of the ways in which the status accorded to horses may influence conceptions of horse-rider relationships.

Chapter 7 Negotiating Power, Personhood, and (In)equality in Horse-Rider Relationships

7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores participants' conceptions of horses as minded, powerful, intelligent agents and the implications of these constructions for the horse-rider relationship. Viewing elite horses as autonomous, quasi-human individuals created a sense of equality between horse and rider that enabled participants to understand equestrian sport and horse-rider relationships as negotiated. Participants reflected on and represented the voices of their horses, suggesting continuity between human and animal species, though they also recognised the inequality between horse and rider and emphasized their responsibility and control over horse-rider interaction. The category bridging the species-gap: individualising and personifying horses outlines how participants described their elite horses and how these conceptions provide a framework for understanding horses and horse-rider relationships in elite sport. The code negotiating power: giving the horse a voice provides an example of one way participants expressed and experienced their horses' power and agency. The in(equality) between species and the limits to equine agency were explored with respect to being in control: rider responsibility in horse-rider relationships.

7.2 Category: Bridging the Species-Gap: Individualising and Personifying Horses

Participants demonstrated in-depth knowledge of their horses as idiosyncratic individuals whose personal qualities had been thoughtfully evaluated. Tegan described her mare, Sage, as "a bit stoic" with "a very dry sense of humour" (P142), while Lara referred to one of her endurance horses as "kind of a diva" (P132), and Kelly described one of her dressage horses as "tricky," "a little hysterical at anything new" and "very generous" (P117). Of Moss, Val stated, "He's a people man, sees a camera and says 'which side would you like?'" (P108). Much of my interview with Melissa consisted of her describing the behavioural routine and preferences of her former elite horse, Monty, a horse with whom Melissa had a close, but challenging relationship. Horses with whom participants shared meaningful relationships were described as engaging, charismatic, intelligent, and influential with respect to the outcomes of horse-rider interaction, as the following excerpt from Jane suggests (P107):

> Fred just used to very politely take the piss sometimes and go, "Oh you think?" He really did, he would bring me down to earth a bit, because I'd be trying really hard and he'd just go, "You know what, try again tomorrow" (P107).

Participants' detailed accounts of horses transcended species boundaries, furthering an image of a unique, almost-human species, particularly with respect to the intellectual acuity of horses. Participants described their encounters with reasoned, sensitive, and intuitive animals with whom they interacted as intellectual equals, appraising their horses in respectful terms, as evident in Jim's reflections on his eventing horse:

> He's extremely creative under pressure, not in terms of trying to get out of things but…he can do things that are theoretically impossible, he's intellectually, he's always switched on (P110).

While a range of anecdotal and scientific evidence suggests the significant learning abilities of horses, equine thought and intelligence represent more contentious topics, with instinctual processes seen as dominating a relatively limited intellectual and reasoning capacity (Whitaker & Whitelaw, 2007). Nonetheless, participant narratives emphasized the intellectual capacity and social understanding of horses, with an image drawn of a powerful and enigmatic equine partner that could create challenge and even dominate horse-rider relationships by exhibiting intelligence and creativity. Of his interaction with his "incredibly sensitive and aware" elite dressage horse, Jim stated "I've just had to (pause) tune up!" (P110), while Elizabeth had experienced a similar intellectual challenge with her elite dressage horse:

> He's very smart, he's one of the smartest horses I've ever had, so you come, you know you're heading out to ride and you think "today I need to be smarter than my horse, if I can do that…" (P124).

Participants were also quick to emphasize the extent to which their horses were capable of recognising their own social power, in keeping with the following description by British eventer, William Fox-Pitt (2009), of Tamarillo, a horse with "a hard-nosed disposition, just very aloof, looking at people on the ground…as his minions, there to serve him as best they could" (p. 62-63). Although the capacity of a horse to think and reason could lead to challenges, the intellectual ability of horses was widely regarded as facilitative of close horse-rider relationships and of sporting success. Further to this, horses

were understood as able to hold participants accountable and respond actively in powerful ways to unsatisfactory horse-rider interactions. After becoming angry with one of her horses after a negative competition experience, Georgina described the horse later reacting aggressively toward her. Following this experience, Georgina increasingly began to believe that horses could think and reason, and influence human behaviour toward them in the process, stating, "I've never felt a horse think like that before" (P134). Understanding horses as intelligent, reasoning creatures was also essential in some instances to the continued ability of participants to engage in equestrian sport:

> They've got great brains, I think they've got great brains, people always tell me that they don't. I'm an eventer; I can't even have a concept that they don't have a brain if I'm out there doing that. I'm going to kill myself if they don't have a brain. I walk the course, I spend half an hour at some jumps trying to figure out how to get through it, they literally get half a second, I mean it's my job to present them there at the correct speed and all that sort of stuff but they get, well less than a second to analyse it, and a good horse, I can be half fallen off and they'll jump it without me. That's intelligence to me, and a willingness and I wouldn't like to be doing that on a cow! (P111).

Further unsettling the power dynamics of human-horse relations were descriptions of how horses educated riders. Jim described his first event horse as responsible for giving him "insight" into the "skills" (P110) required of an elite rider, while Melissa enunciated a similar perspective with respect to her first competition horse:

> He just taught me the whole learning process of how to educate [horses] and then and how not to educate [horses] and then how to fix the mistakes you've made…he taught me a heap (P109).

Explaining the camaraderie and closeness of certain horse-rider relationships involved minimizing, even obliterating, species differences. Claire described her Olympic eventing horse as "a good mate" to whom she "could go 'shit Ronny, I'm not feeling good today' and he could say 'same'!" (P120), though this reference to Ronny speaking back was clearly colloquial, though nonetheless, meaningful. Participants were disparaging of those who saw a horse as "just a horse" (P125), describing this as an inappropriately minimalistic view of horses:

> Noddy is just like another human, you don't treat him as a horse, you don't see him and go "that's my horse." It's just like, that's your best friend…if anything's ever gonna work, you have to be at one with each other (P145).

International dressage coach, George Theodorescu (as cited by Collins, 2006) suggests that the horse's status to the rider should be that of "friend…as an equal, just like a human. The trainer can't think of the animal as a dumb beast" (p. 115). Creating intellectual and moral distance between horse and rider did not appear to fit with the first-hand experiences of participants or of other elite athletes who interact with horses in physically and mentally challenging sporting contexts. Funnell (2005) writes, "A lot of people think that a horse is just an animal that requires feeding and looking after, but to me most of them are people; they know who you are, and they react to you" (p. 142).

Participant narratives also emphasized the role of meta-knowledge (Finkenauer & Righetti, 2011) in horse-human relations, with participants conceptualising their horses and alluding to how their horses viewed and understood them. Hayley carefully described how her current vaulting horse behaved toward her and interpreted her behavioural signals, suggesting that the horse was cognizant of her "persona" (P144) as she approached him, allowing him to anticipate the nature of the interaction that would follow. In reflecting on this, Hayley was able to envisage her own behaviour and self from the horse's perspective, extending her knowledge of the animal and their relationship. Para-equestrian Emma also had a sense of how her current horse, Bayley saw her, noting his protectiveness towards her, while Ellen spoke at length about what she meant to two notable horses in her career, describing how one of the horses had experienced major health issues, and had required her emotional and physical support:

> He was very special and I protected him a lot and....we went through a lot of stuff together. He had a serious lung issue, he was on chemotherapy for a year he was, he nearly died (participant emotional) I brought him back from that and he supported me when I became disabled. [He] went from being a fit Grand Prix horse to "Oh here, I'll just walk you round, it'll be okay" (P139).

Both horse and rider had experienced physical incapacitation, serious illness, and a loss of identity, though Ellen focuses on describing Buddy's experiences rather than her own. Although she did not allude directly to her own suffering, I sensed the parallel between horse and rider when she seamlessly shifted from references to her own illness to

describing what Buddy had been reduced to following his chemotherapy treatment. When I questioned Ellen about how she had supported Buddy while he was sick, she responded simply, "He wanted to die and I wouldn't let him" (P139). Without hesitation eventing rider Beth stated of her elite horse Mack: "He knows what I'm thinking and I know what he's thinking" (P136), while Hannah told me that as Chance hovered between life and death after developing a brain edema, the veterinary team noticed that the only person on whom he was able to focus was Hannah. Feeling known, and as though one knows one's horse, particularly with respect to interpersonal qualities such as personality traits, may be pivotal to creating the right conditions for a strong interspecies attachment to develop (Arluke, 1994).

One way of substantiating the depth of attachment between horse and rider was to refer to the transcendence of species boundaries, with Hannah stating of Chance, "I don't see him as a horse, you see him as your best friend, you know" (P125), while Val described her current competition horse, Moss, as a soul-mate, likening their relationship to marriage in its mutuality and "give and take" (P108). When I asked Val how she acted around Moss, she responded, "Just like he's a human, like I talk to him like he's a person, and yeah I really, he's just like a friend standing there that I can talk to" (P108), adding, "if I stop to have a conversation with somebody, he's the third person, he's listening too, he'll just stand there and listen, yep, I think he thinks he's a human" (P108). Viewing horses as quasi-humans affected how participants behaved toward them; as the following excerpt from Georgina illustrates:

> I mean I used to plait him, plait him before the cross-country and used to tell him every single fence and exactly how we were going to jump every single fence and I really believed that he listened (P134).

Although Georgina spoke lightly of the horse understanding what she was communicating, her narrative suggested that feeling as though the horse was attentive to her actions created a sense of camaraderie and shared focus between them. Understanding horses also involved drawing parallels between the self and one's equine partner, as Jim did, describing his elite eventer as "a like soul with me" (P110), while Ethan noted how similarity between horse and rider may affect the horse-rider relationship:

> I remember when I got Milo when I was young, [a] very good friend of our families who knew horses said the strangest thing in my mind, she said "Milo

> looks like Ethan," that they look alike, you know what I mean, you think that's strange thing to say, but then it isn't either cos there's something about the horse that you like, something you know? (P113).

Questioning what separates and connects us to horses may be an important part of the cognitive work of the elite equestrian athlete, while as Oakley et al., (2010) suggests, gains may be made in the act of "blurring the boundaries between 'human' and 'animal'" (p. 90). Participants drew images of part-human horses (rather than referring to the animality of humans), in keeping with Game's (2001) contentions around the centaur metaphor in horse-human relations. Humanising horses appeared to elevate the moral and social status of the animal, allowing participants to experience horses as equal partners with whom they could tackle complex mental and physical challenges. There are boundaries to the extent to which a horse may be attributed selfhood and personhood, however, and participants' claims about horses and horse-rider relationships reflected this. Lara, for instance, expressed ambivalence about her own attributions with regard to the relationship she experienced with her main endurance horse; while Ethan noted the way one of his elite horses looked at him in recognition, but questioned whether his interpretations were accurate:

> I always wonder whether we sort of give them human emotions because we make it up in our own mind, but he always used to look at me and I've seen horses do stuff like that where they recognise their owners (P113).

Heidi was emphatic about species boundaries, noting how humanising horses destroyed, rather than elevated them, with references to the "simple" and "pure" (P133) nature of an animal's thought processes. Maintaining the purity of the horse-rider relationship, Heidi suggested, required an understanding of the distinct differences between human and animal species. Humanising horses may also create risks with respect to the care and management of elite horses. From a welfare perspective, a loss of horse status may lead to changes to a horse's lifestyle that have implications for the psychological well-being of elite horses (Henderson, 2007). One of part-owner and dressage rider, Carl Hector's concerns in selling Champion dressage horse, Valegro, was that the horse might never again be allowed to "be a horse" (Hester, as cited by Eurodressage, 2013) after having been sold for a multi-million dollar sum. This may be because the horse's status has shifted to that of a highly valuable commodity, however, not because the horse has come to

be seen as humanlike. Nonetheless, this example illustrates how the lives and status of elite horses may change due to sporting success. Viewing horses as part-human could have negative implications for horse-human interaction in other ways, tempting riders to be less patient and tolerant toward horses, as Amelia suggests:

> You can't get angry with them because they just don't understand... Some of them are smart but at the end of the day they don't have the same capacity, the same thoughts that we're able to have so you've got to be able to communicate with them, yeah a bit differently (P119).

While a number of participants engaged with anthropomorphic appraisals of horses, horses, and horse-rider relationships were not viewed as easy to understand, in part because of the species- and language-barrier. Claudia hesitated to say exactly how strong her relationship with her vaulting horse was, because, "You can't always read a horse, exactly what he's thinking, he's not a person so…" (P140). Participants shifted between traditional and anthropomorphic appraisals of animals, acknowledging species differences and their responsibilities to horses, while appraising horses in ways that fostered an informed, intimate sense of the animal and the horse-rider relationship. The status of the horse-human relationship was also considered with respect to other forms of human-animal attachment, with participants alluding to pet-human relationships as a counterpoint to horse-rider relationships. Some embraced the parallel between pets and elite sport horses, with Crystal referring to her horses as "like dogs" and Grace describing one of her horses, Morry as "like a dog sometimes" (P135). Other participants were keen to differentiate between the way horses and pets are treated, emphasizing that indulgence and a lack of discipline should not characterize relationships with competition horses:

> I don't pamper, I don't treat him [competition horse] like a pet, like some people with their horses are really (pause) like pets and they give lots of treats and cookies but it's more of umm a...working relationsh-, not a working relationship that's not quite the right thing but but they're not, you know you don't give your children cookies and treats all the time, right? (P136).

Val was also emphatic about this, stating, "You can't make a pet out of your horse because it just doesn't work" (P108), noting, "the cat or the budgie gives you the fuzzy feeling...only…the friendship with the horse gives you the fuzzy feeling plus you can do things together" (P108). Participants also drew attention to the ways in which mutual

activity may foster a distinctive interspecies relationship that is at least partially professional in nature. Interestingly, some participants distinguished between different categories of horses, in particular, those classified as performance horses and those with whom a close, pet-like relationship had been established, as in the case of Hannah's elite horse, Chance, who had been purchased and treated as a "pet horse" (P125). This had left Hannah with a sense of moral obligation to protect him from the commodified life of a professional competition horse, even though he now was a competition horse:

> You can never sell because it's the, it's the [nationality], the [cohort of people], that buy all our horses in [country name] and I mean, they pay a *lot* of money for them, you don't really want to know how much they offer people for their horses and it's difficult to say no but…you can never sell a pet horse to a person, a rider that makes his living from that, that's his job, a professional ride-, I'm trying to get the right words, yeah, a professional rider basically, because for him, it's not gonna be a pet. It's gonna be a horse to compete. And a pet horse wants to be cuddled, is used to being loved…feeling special. And it's not gonna get that and it's gonna be unhappy... I'll never be able to do that to him, it'd be black money (P125).

As Hannah's narrative reflects, the status of elite competition horses may change markedly across their lifespans, depending on the moral and commercial value assigned to a horse. Although these changes may not always be of a negative nature, it is interesting to consider the impact changes to a horse's status may have on its welfare and on the form of interaction that occurs between horses and humans.

7.2.1 Code: Negotiating Power: Giving the Horse a Voice

Dynamic power negotiations characterize horse-rider interaction in elite equestrian sport. These occur through attributions of agency to horses, indicated in participant narratives through the ways in which horses control and influence horse-rider interaction, as has been outlined, and with respect to the horse's voice, conveyed and understood in figurative or literal terms. In many instances during interviews, participants re-enacted a dialogue that had occurred or continued to occur, between themselves and their horses, as Jim does here in context to one of his elite horses:

> As he realised he was good at things he'd tell me. I'd say "Yeah you're really good mate," and he'd go "Yeah I'm really good, I think I'm better than anyone in the world," and you go, "Yeah you're really good, you're probably better than anyone else in the world," "I am better than anyone else in the world," "Yeah you're better than everyone else in the world." That's the conversation you have and then you're gonna go out there and show everyone how much better he is than them (P111).

Participants listened to horses and relayed what they perceived during interview sessions, describing bi-directional, ongoing dialogue between horse and rider. Issues that arose between horse and rider, in particular, were commonly described as conversations. Melissa, for instance, described her young stallion's objections to a problem with his saddle, "He just went, 'Nup this hurts me, get off' and we fixed it and he went, "Oh okay that's great now, let's go'" (P109). Although dialogue between horse and rider was sometimes conflictual in nature and described in colloquial terms, its presence suggested a distribution of power between horse and rider, something that Lara described culminating in "debate" between horse and rider, enacted mentally and physically:

> The whole loop he's, like, totally strung out on adrenaline and wants to go, wants to go but you have like nine miles more to go, you need to keep yourself in check and he really doesn't want to and doesn't want to, and he'll fight me on it and then we, so he doesn't really understand me in that perspective, he's always, "No my way, my way" and I'm like, "No! stop it! It's my way!," so we do have the debates and usually we go back out there and after he's settled and I've settled, we work really well together (P132).

Interaction between horse and rider was dynamic, energy-infused, and described with reference to conversational exchanges, a notion that may contradict the more one-dimensional exchanges that may occur in dominance-based interspecies relationships. Indeed, in some instances, rather than dictating to horses, it was participants who were dictated to by horses. Jane referred to her former dressage mare as "always very outspoken" (P107), while Georgina described one of her eventers as an independent, powerful figure, with a mind and a voice of his own:

> You just had to leave him to his own devices, he just said, "Don't try and show me a stride, don't try and hold me up, I can't do it if you interfere, just leave me alone," and he made that very clear, very early (P134).

Other horses, too, were seen as independent, powerful agents, and capable of conveying this to the rider:

> The horse that won [competition] and [competition] was not so complicated, but I never sat on him until he was about fourteen and he, well, had his habits by then and equally he said, "You just leave me on my own, I know what I'm doing" (P134).

Participants listened and responded democratically to horses, as Georgina put it, "You get on a horse and you ask what he wants to be ridden like, I think. You don't get on a horse and say, 'You're going to do it my way'" (P134). Whether references to discussion between horse and rider were metaphoric or literal, they reinforced a sense of respect for the horse's rights and agency. The opinions and inner worlds of horses mattered to participants, and as Lucy's account illustrates, participants were attentive to the cues horses conveyed:

> If he doesn't like something, *you know*. If he does like something, *you know*, cos he'll put his ears back or he'll, you know, and it's just him, having his opinion out loud (P130).

Democracy and humility often underlined participants' attitudes to horses. Val, for instance, described a superlative performance with Moss in which he "allowed me to guide him while he performed" (P108), while Tegan was prepared to negotiate with and even concede control to her mare Sage in order to preserve their relationship, describing here what would happen if she did not:

> There will come a day where she will say, "Enough, and I'm not going to do that," so instead what I like to do is, you know, kinda get on their back and go, "Okay where are we today?" …I try really hard never to get in an argument with her, with any horse, but in particular with Sage I, if I see that it's going, we're not agreeing on something, I back down and I kind of...step off (P142).

Tegan's description suggests a powerful equine partner who actively contributes to the status quo between horse and rider. Elisa also listened for signals from her horse that the time was right to ask for more in a performance context, acceding control over the progression of the riding work to the horse, stating "your horse tells you how fast you can ah, ah do things" (P146). Further to this, I noted how the boundaries and power dynamics between horse and rider appeared to shift with the closeness of the relationship. Horses with whom participants had close relationships were often treated more permissively and accorded more power over the course of horse-rider interaction, particularly with respect to training activities, with a strong sense of rider accountability emerging. Jane noted of her mare, Molly, "she expected me to be good and if I made a mistake she would be very angry with me" (P107), describing how she had to "ask permission" before entering Molly's stall. Participants also tended to have higher expectations of the horses with whom they had close relationships, as Lara describes with respect to her endurance mare:

> I let her get away with a lot of things and I adore her to pieces, she's like my baby…but I also don't let her get away with things I let other horses get away with. If I first get on a horse and he bucks and I'll sit it and push through and just assume that maybe it's the rider and then if it happens again I'll discipline, but if it's her, I'll discipline her right away and I do find and I really work on it, I do lose patience with her because sometimes she, I know she knows better and she's just getting excited umm so I feel bad in a way that I do lose patience with her, which I don't do with, especially horses that are not mine (P132).

Lara's narrative reflects the complex fashion in which boundaries in horse-rider relationships may shift as a product of ownership, continued involvement with a horse, and the closeness of the relationship. Conceding some "authority and autonomy" (p. 8) to horses also emerged in Dashper's (2015) research on horse-rider relationships in an amateur context, as a means of maintaining fun and enjoyment in horse-human interaction. Once a horse has proved itself to be of a certain calibre, participants reported being more tolerant of behavioural aberrations, as long as performance outcomes were still achieved, as Kathy describes:

> I think if you've got that trust in them you're, you let them play a bit and they can, there's a certain amount that they can be horses too, but to a certain extent they've just got to be able to do the job…I'm not too tough on her, you've got

> to give a little bit of, leeway anyway shall we say and 'it doesn't quite matter if you do this or don't do this but we'll train that out of you because that's going to make you a better horse but umm you deserve a little bit of, umm yeah as I say, leeway or special treatment I suppose because you are an elite horse and you've proved you're gonna cut it' (P115).

Inherent in participants' accounts was a sense of fluidity around the roles inhabited by horse and rider in relationship to each other and the power-based exchanges that occurred. As Ellie put it, "Sometimes you need to be a leader; sometimes you need to be able to stand back and just let it go" (P131). In addition, Ellie noted, "You don't need always to be all cuddly and loving, sometimes you need to tell them, 'No, you're in my space, get out of my space'" (P131). Participants noted the need to exert a certain measure of control over the horse, as Hayley describes here, yet interacting with horses also required a certain degree of softness:

> I think it's important that you have confidence, because if you are extremely placid all of the time, then horses, especially, I mean, horses that are more inclined to push the boundaries, will push the boundaries and then they end up with no respect umm I think that it's important to be able to be confident when needed and it's important to be able to be soothing and calming when needed…sometimes you need to be calmed down, not forced through something (P144).

Despite the emphasis on equality and the way in which participants portrayed their horses as powerful sporting partners, obtaining the horse's submission, and by default, achieving a measure of dominance was nonetheless a part of the relationship between horse and rider. This was particularly evident for participants who regarded their horses as intelligent and strong characters. Elizabeth talked at length about the intellectual status of her horse and how at times he had proven himself more intelligent than her. She had embraced this challenge, but it had not been easy for her to prevail and she viewed prevailing as a necessity to the continuance of their relationship. Rather than presenting an egalitarian model of their relationship, Elizabeth was keen to emphasize how she had to be smarter than her equine sporting partner from whom she "never stopped learning" (P124). Achieving the submission of an agentic, intelligent horse carried a different resonance to

dominating a horse positioned as lacking in agency or intellectual ability and therefore, social power.

Where participants' revered the social, mental, and physical power of horses, domination could be understood as a requirement of the horse-rider relationship, with the smaller, weaker human partner reliant upon the willingness and submission of a powerful equine partner. Dominance was a nuanced and sensitive issue, however, and not something that was considered inherently appropriate in horse-rider relationships, as Georgina describes:

> [Trainer's name] said the reason why X and Y have such terrible falls and they're top class riders is because they're so bloody horrible to the horses and they're so tough and when their horse puts a foot out of line they get punished. As the horse makes a mistake and hits a fence, instead of going, "Shit, I better get myself out of this," doing everything he can to re-, to survive, his reaction is, "My God, I'm going to get into trouble," and that split second when his instinct should have taken over, his instinct's been dulled by the domination of the rider and that was one of the most fascinating explanations…I've ever been given about what a relationship is. It's got not to be built on fear, respect everyday of the week, respect, you for him, him for you or her, but it's not got to be built on fear and it's a very very fine line, disciplining a naughty horse...you have to be very tough and at the right moments and...it's tantamount for domination but it's different (P134).

In addition to this, Lucy believed riders needed to be "not too dominating because when you dominate them [horses] there's no room for the horse to have an opinion, and the horses need to have an opinion" (P130), distancing herself from, but not discarding the notion of dominance altogether. Other participants challenged the notion that horses and riders are able to negotiate a truly egalitarian relationship; with Matthew arguing that horse-rider interaction is "not a debate" in which horse and rider discuss the rider's commands and decide what to do next. One way of navigating the tension around domination was to emphasize the fairness with which dominance could be enacted. As Matthew puts it, "You are dominating them, but you're kinda doing it in a nice way" (P111). "Nice domination" (P111), although somewhat of a contradiction, speaks to the task-oriented nature of horse-rider interaction in competitive sport. Furthering an analogy

between the power dynamics in a work context and horse-rider interaction, Matthew likened his interaction with horses to asking questions of an employee:

> If you've got somebody working for you, you say, "Could you type me this letter," it's not like, you're not supposed to say, "No I'm not going to"…cos they have a job to do and that's a little how you look at them [horses] really...it definitely isn't a discussion we're having, it is about doing what I want, but you've got to be nice about it though! (P111).

A certain measure of control and power over horses may be required, but as Kathy noted "there's always different ways to go about it" (P115), suggesting that control over horses may be achieved through more or less democratic means. Choosing willing and able sport horses may reduce the impetus to dominate or coerce, a realisation that changed how Jim engaged with horses in sport. He had attempted to dominate horses into submission in the early part of his riding career, recalling how memories of this made him want to "vomit" (P110). Developing maturity as a rider, along with the decision to select only horses that "want to do" (P110) elite sport was pivotal to the shift in Jim's riding practices:

> I used to beat the shit out them [horses] in the early days to persuade them that they needed to be (pause) my theory was they needed to be more frightened of me than the job being done. That's a stupid thing, stupid stupid stupid stupid, well I (pause) if the kids have got a horse that doesn't want to do it, well hey hey, well we're not dumb here, if the horse doesn't want to do it, he doesn't have to! You know, there'll be other things that he'll want to do, so we don't even take a breath, if a horse doesn't want to do something, we are *not* gonna beat them into it, so none of the kids are on horses other than horses that *want* to do the job (P111).

Finally, as will be illustrated in the following section, achieving a certain measure of control and power over horses fairly and ethically may facilitate the development of safe, manageable horse-rider relationships, with a lack of control over horses placing both horse and rider at risk.

7.2.2 Code: Being in Control: Rider Responsibility in Horse-Rider Relationships

As has been discussed, participants positioned their horses as intelligent, sensitive individuals, creating a sense of equality around the horse-rider relationship. Horses were also acknowledged as powerful, agentic creatures with the capacity to shape and in some instances, control horse-rider interaction. Yet notions of equality and mutuality in horse-rider relationships were tempered by an awareness of the power imbalance between horse and rider and rider responsibility. Of her up-and-coming event horse, Amelia noted, "He makes me nervous cos I think he's the best horse I've ever had and I'm scared to make a mistake, scared that he'll get injured" (P119), while Lara's self-perceived failure to act responsibly toward her horse during a competition was accompanied by strong emotions:

> He was lame in the back end and that I think was the worst ride for me ever because I didn't, I am really talented to feel a lameness and [horse's name] (pause) didn't tell me…I couldn't feel it….and he carried me through it which is sort of where I fell in love with him, he took me home and [I] felt really bad because of what I did or what I felt I did (P132).

The stronger the connection between horse and rider, the greater the responsibility the rider may feel to act responsibly toward the horse and the greater the emotional repercussions may be when things go wrong. One interesting dimension of the relationship between horse and rider was that where a strong relationship is present, the potential for the horse to be exploited may in fact increase. Being a responsible rider meant not exploiting a horse's willingness and being attentive to its welfare. Jim described needing to develop "high sensibilities" as an elite rider, using cross-country riding as an example of a situation where the rider must be constantly aware of the horse's responses to the competitive challenge, with extreme physical exertion and fatigue increasing the risk of a horse making a mistake at a fence, and heightening the need for riders to act responsibly. Participants' reflections on incidents that had occurred early in their careers emerged as an avenue through which to consider the consequences of not assuming responsibility for horse welfare. A number of participants described incidents that had resulted in serious, sometimes career-ending injuries to their horses, while in other instances; participants expressed gratefulness toward horses for tolerating their ignorance and excelling in spite of it. With respect to two championship wins early in his career, Jim commented, "I had no right to do that, it was because he [horse] was so generous and kept pulling me out of the

soup" (P110). While the power imbalance between horse and rider could provoke psychological discomfort, participants were also clear that as riders, they needed to be able to assert control over the horse in order to establish a safe and healthy relationship, while being able to control the horse was conceived in some instances as a sign of relationship quality, with Hannah able to control Chance using vocal commands even when he was being ridden by another.

Having psychological control over one's horse carried a sense of responsibility that served as an ethical template for understanding horse-rider interaction as it occurs in and outside of competition. Participants described being responsible for the horse's trust and willingness and upholding the horse-rider relationship, and in some instances this meant asserting control over the horse, even if this created conflict. The context and manner in which control is asserted over horses may be critical in determining its implications for the horse-rider relationship. Being intellectually flexible represented one egalitarian way of being responsible toward horses, with Amy emphasizing the risks of expecting the horse to meet the rider on human terms, noting, "A lot [of] riders expect the horse to learn their language (pause) instead of us learning theirs. I think they're [horses] always talking to us, and you learn what they're saying" (P143). Ignoring this communication was not only irresponsible, but dishonoured horse-rider relationships, as Lara suggests:

> I have to be honest enough to know how much my horse can go and not to push it and that honesty, like it's honesty in a way of "I'm not going to push you enough that you'll end up in trouble." Horses in the race can easily, easily, lameness is really common but but there's other issues, shutting down, deaths, are really common, well not really common but they are common (P132).

The threat equestrian sport posed to a horse's safety made being a responsible rider all the more paramount, while another way of dealing with this risk was to consider that horses personally enjoy and willingly engage in sport. Not all participants held this view, however, with some suggesting that horses could be forced to perform. As Matthew notes, "I suppose you could look at it mystically and suppose that the horse wants to do it as well, but it doesn't, it wants to eat grass in the paddock really" (P111). A number of participants countered this view, however, arguing that horses participate in sport because they enjoy doing so, as the following excerpt from Jane indicates:

> People say they don't have a choice but they do… if they wanna say no, they say no. I think they enjoy, I certainly, I know they enjoy the work, because if they don't get it when they're expecting it they get shitty (P107).

Interestingly, while Matthew described the human-centric nature of equestrian sport and discarded the idea that horses care about sport, he also suggested that on some level, horses choose to participate in equestrian sport:

> There's no horse here [competition venue] that doesn't want to do that, and there's a lot of horses that don't wanna do that sorta stuff…there's heaps of horses that won't even go on the truck (P107).

Horses that are physically suited to their sport were, participants suggested, more likely to be engaged participants. With respect to one of her Grand Prix dressage horses, Jane stated:

> He likes learning new things, everyday he wants to go out and learn something new, if I don't teach him something new he'll make up something of his own, develop something that he's going to do that we have to work on (P107).

Similarly, Crystal described experiencing performances that were so harmonious that they were considered "special…even to the horse" (P138). Thus one way of positioning horses in sport may be to view their participation as an opportunity for self-expression and physical and psychological development, with the rider responsible for furthering the horse's innate mental and physical potential, as Ellen indicates:

> I've been riding longer than any of these horses have been around so I know what's possible, more than the horse itself knows and I can help that horse become more than it could think of on its own. That's my job…to help shape the horse into an even more beautiful creature than it already is (P141).

Further to this, Kelly suggested that horses are capable of recognising and embracing the possibilities of equestrian sport independent of rider direction:

> I think there is a moment where they grasp something that you're trying to do and they actually do embrace a partnership. Somewhere along the line when they actually understand it they will try harder and try more and that's an interesting moment in it, that when you get to that stage where they go, "Yep,

> yeah I can do that and if you back off and leave me alone I'll do it more" (P117).

Working with horses that recognise these possibilities may encourage the development of a mutually fulfilling partnership, with Jim describing how "talented" horses are capable of recognising "territory" (P110) that requires a human partner. Some horses, he suggested, may even "apply themselves" (P110) to equestrian sport having realized "that they can become expressive through training" (P110), a realisation that takes place over time:

> There comes a day when the horse has had the routine, has been gone through so many times, they recognise the routine, and they're also recognising that it's wonderfully exhilarating and they're actually starting to do things that are umm very difficult and would normally only come out when their soul is singing. Like you know, they are really stirred up in the paddock and that's when they're umm their bloods on fire…. Then they realise they're all of a sudden being able to reach into worlds of expression and then it becomes a study for them and they understand that to, you know, to study into unchartered waters, they need the partner, the rider and then it becomes something that's very special and becomes artistic and you start to [see] the true potentials, or not, of the horse (P110).

Once a horse is exhilarated by sporting activities, together horse and rider may "reach into worlds of expression" (P110), culminating in a mutually fulfilling sporting engagement. Drawing on a similar argument, Evans and Franklin (2010) identify how equestrian sports can be inherently satisfying to the horse, referring to the "exhilaration" (p. 180) that accompanies certain body movements, while McLean (2003) notes how pleasurable stimuli can be used to reinforce animal training. Believing that a horse may find sport enjoyable provided participants with a way of understanding equestrian sports as an expression of mutual engagement rather than coercion, and helped participants align an emphasis on being competitive with an emphasis on forming strong horse-rider relationships. Where the horse-rider relationship was a priority, considering what sport means to horses and acknowledging the potential value of sporting activities to horse and rider served to reduce any cognitive dissonance around continued participation in a sport that had the propensity to seriously injure or kill valued horses. Placing the horse above

competitive outcomes reflected an identity claim for participants, particularly in sports where their fellow competitors were seen as behaving unethically toward horses:

> I really like to have a great relationship with my horses, I don't, I always put my horses first but there's so many people that don't, umm it's like, it should be interesting to hear *them* say something. For me it's like, the horse, you're just giving the horse an opportunity to do something. (P125).

Sporting challenges may present both horse and rider with an opportunity to transpose new landscapes, in which sporting performances transcend physical capabilities, and horse and rider become transformed, but this does not take place without risk and uncertainty. It may be possible that equestrian sport represents an opportunity for self-expression for both partners, but the inequality between horse and rider means that being responsible toward horses constitutes an important aspect of ethical horse-rider interaction.

7.3 Discussion of Findings:

Participants positioned horses as intelligent and agentic individuals, capable of engaging "as full-fledged partners in collective action" (Sanders, 2003, p. 420), in this instance, of a sporting nature. This was in line with research conducted by Argent (2010), Dashper (2015), and Maurstad et al., (2013) that identified the individuality accorded to horses in horse-rider relationships. Participants gave voice to their horses' preferences, thoughts, feelings, and emotions and sought to convey the subjective experiences and characteristics of horses in the process, in keeping with Sander's (1993) concept of attributing personhood to animals, while agency and individuality were also evident in these voices. Research on companion parrots (Anderson, 2003) and human-dog encounters (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Kuhl, 2011) has also identified how giving animals voices is closely related to constructions of animal agency, with Arluke and Sanders (1996) suggesting that this practice reflects a deep-seated understanding of animals, while Kuhl (2011) notes that giving voice to animals may be understood as an attempt to understand and express one's understanding of animal species.

Participants' understandings of equine agency played a powerful role in horse-rider interaction, with Evans and Franklin (2010) noting how the unit of horse and rider reflects, but is distinct from, the human-car unit because the horse's independence means that unlike a vehicle, it may reject or embrace a partnership with a human. Nonetheless,

animals make agentic choices within the relational and contextual limits implied by the social and cultural context in which they exist, meaning animal agency, like human agency, is contextually defined and limited (Carter & Charles, 2013). In identifying horses as unique individuals with personalities that impact upon human-animal relations in profound ways, participants' narratives aligned with those in research by Kuhl (2011) on human-sled dog relationships, as well as that by Sanders (1999) and Irvine (2004a). In minimising the distance between humans and animals, participants created an image of horses that aligned with their personal experiences of interacting with a powerful, intelligent animal amidst considerable physical and mental challenges. Further to this, and in line with the findings of extant research on human-animal relationships (Fox, 2006; Sanders & Arluke, 1993), participants experienced their equine partners in ways that transcended instinct-based explanations of animals. Indeed, even in instances where participants regarded humans as significantly mentally superior to horses, horses were still described as mentally developed, creative, ingenious, and powerful social actors.

These anthropomorphic notions of horses contradict traditional scientific segregation of humans and animals and challenge traditional symbolic interactionist notions of what may constitute a meaningful social relationship. Rather than considering participants morally imbued, parsimonious descriptions of horses as the product of "misguided logic or intellectual naivety" (Argent, 2010, p. 169), I argue that these descriptions made sense to participants because they fit with their daily experiences of horses as sentient, aware, communicative, and intentional beings. Furthermore, understanding horses in this fashion may be critical to creating the necessary conditions for a dynamic two-way interspecies relationship to develop (Brandt, 2004). Participants viewed their horses as capable of interacting with humans not as symbols, but as active, intentional agents (Brandt, 2004; Warkentin, 2010), reinforcing the notion that horse-rider relationships are meaningful and deserve to be taken seriously.

Science has historically treated the "anthropomorphic delusion" (Sanders, 2003, p. 420) as a cognitive error (Fisher, 1990), implying that an inaccurate, sentimental, self-oriented projection has been made (Irvine, 2004a), yet whether this is the case, and what exactly constitutes anthropomorphism has been broadly debated (cf. Fisher, 1990; Hayward, 1997; Keeley, 2004; Wynne, 2007). Some have suggested it is not anthropomorphic to describe animal motivations (Midgley, 1978) and that to simply regard anthropomorphism as a logical mistake is to oversimplify the question of animal consciousness (Fisher, 1990), while Bekoff (2008) has argued that "being

anthropomorphic" (p. 10) does not mean falsely attributing to animals what is only true of humans, but rather recognising commonalities between species and enunciating these commonalities from a human perspective. Others have suggested that the attribution of any intentions to animals is a mistake (Davidson, 1975). As has been noted, it is not within the scope of this work to closely examine the conscious mental experiences and inner lives of horses. While questions of equine psychology have inadvertently been raised, this study is primarily concerned with what anthropomorphic attributions of emotion, intentionality, and perspective (Morris, Fidler, & Costall, 2000) along with claims for the individuality and autonomy of animals, mean for horse-rider relationships in elite sport and it is to this issue that I now turn.

Describing animal individuals, rather than animal categories (Haraway, 2003) may be a discursive strategy designed to oppose "Cartesianism and the reduction of animals to brutes" (Hoquet, 2013, p. 75), with anthropomorphism a powerful way of inferring and documenting animal individuality otherwise lost in the homogenous uniformity of understanding animals within singular species categories (Hoquet, 2013). Rather than simply offering their own "anthropomorphic projection[s]" (Irvine, 2004a, p. 3), however, and in keeping with the findings of Fox (2006), participants retained a sense of the animal in their otherwise anthropomorphized descriptions of horses. Bekoff (2002) refers to this as process of "humanising animals with care" (p. 48), a kind of middle ground anthropomorphism in which the animal's history and biological qualities are upheld (Burghardt, 1998). Upholding such a view allowed participants to attribute sentience to their equine partners whilst avoiding the "dishonesty and narcissism" (Aaltola, 2010, p. 45) associated with approaching another species without consideration for its unique characteristics and circumstances.

Making inferences about equine thought and behaviour appeared to allow participants to construct an image of how horses experience the world, leading to what Smith and Mitchell (2012) refer to as "informed empathy for animals" (p. 341) and a sense of mutual understanding in the horse-rider relationship. As Burghardt (1985) has noted, speculative enquiry about animals has the potential to be useful and healthy, particularly if the attributions that result from it facilitate the development of respectful, compassionate, and attentive interspecies relationships. In keeping with Carter and Charles (2013), participants also acknowledged the contextually- and structurally-based limits of animal agency and intentionality, and were careful not to overstate the equine capacity for self-directed action. As Pearson (2013) states with respect to dog-human relationships during

war, dogs may possess agency, "but it was humans who brought the dogs into the trenches" (p. 143). Similarly, horse-rider relationships may be shaped by a complex combination of equality and inequality, with horses possessing agency and power, but not in equal measure to that possessed by their human partners.

In understanding the significance of attributing personhood to horses, it is necessary to reflect on what depersonalization means for both human and animal species. In "Exterminate All the Brutes," Lindqvist (1996) describes how the animalisation of humans commonly leads to attempts to destroy, or at very least justify destroying a category of people, while Haslam (2006) suggests that dehumanisation strategies remove an individual's agency and individuality, and in the process, render the individual void of the ability to arouse compassion and moral emotion, citing a range of research that suggests that those denied humanness tend to be treated more harshly than those who are not. Humans who are seen as animals or as acting like animals are often understood as products of disgust, debased versions of humanity (Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 2000). Being human, Thomas (1983) writes, (as cited by Dixon, 2008, p. 240) is to be associated with being "civil, rational, and good," while being animal is associated with being "fierce, gluttonous, wanton, brutal…governed by beastly impulses, bodily appetite and passions." Further to this, he states:

> The category of *beast, brute and animal* has also been used to stand for human members of our society thought to be inferior. At one time or another blacks, American Indians, Irish, infants and children, women, the poor, and common people have all been characterized as primitive, wild, and savage (as cited by Dixon, 2008, p. 240).

Depersonalising animals, Hoquet (2013) argues, makes it acceptable for us to relate to them as products rather than individuals, in line with Hannah's comment that to think of a horse "as just a horse" (P125) was to minimize the animal's status. Beauchamp (2011) argues that the more we consider an animal as autonomous and human-like, the greater the moral status usually accorded to the animal, while Russell (2010) points to the association between personhood and rights. The emphasis placed on the individuality, autonomy, and quasi-human qualities of horses reflects the value participants placed on horses as sentient, moral beings (Bradie, 2011). It may also reflect an attempt to demonstrate the significance and legitimacy of the horse-rider relationship. Irvine (2004a, 2004b) suggests that blurring species boundaries is one means of justifying close interspecies relationships;

acknowledging the agency of animals in reciprocally experienced relationships may be another (Fox, 2006). In a direct reference to this blurring of boundaries, Shaw (2013, p. 158) writes, "The pinnacle of social coordination is unity…man on a horse becomes the horse-and-rider." As in human relationships, it may be that the beliefs one partner holds about the other have the potential to influence behaviour and relationship development, culminating in self-fulfilling prophecies (Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998; Lent & Lopez, 2002).

One concern that stems from notions of animal agency and moral status is the argument that if animals have the moral capacity to be good, they must also have the capacity to be morally bad (Dixon, 2008). As Russell (2010, p. 16) states, "Status as a person carries certain rights and perhaps responsibilities, both legal and moral," and there is a risk in anthropomorphism that animals will be seen as responsible for that which they arguably cannot be held responsible (McLean, 2003; Bradshaw & Casey, 2007). Yet anthropomorphic understandings can incorporate an awareness of the biological properties of species, meaning that anthropomorphism does not necessarily lead to treating animals as morally responsible as humans are. Another concern is that in understanding animals in context to humans, we fail to engage with the unique qualities of animals and view them as valid in their own right (Hansen, 2009). This is a genuine concern; however, along with Kennedy (1992) and Serpell (2003), I argue that humans are inevitably limited to human perspectives, with research indicating that our susceptibility to seeing others as though they are like ourselves extends even to our interaction with robots (Kiesler, Powers, Fussell, & Torrey, 2008). As in intra-species relationships, those engaged in equestrian sports may benefit from feeling understood by their equine partner and believing that they understand the horse in turn; thus anthropomorphic thinking, as well as being inevitable, may also be constructive.

Equestrian athletes may not have full access to the inner experiences of horses, yet as Mitchell (2012) suggests, perhaps we have as much access to animal experiences as we do to those of our own species. As Bekoff (2008) notes, in every relationship inferences made about another are approximations, while research on empathic accuracy has revealed relatively low levels of accuracy in friendships (Stinson & Ickes, 1992), romantic relationships (Thomas & Fletcher, 2003), and coach-athlete relationships (Jowett & Clark-Carter, 2006; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009a). These findings suggest it may be inaccurate to assume we are experts at interpreting our own species and damned to ignorance in our interpretations of other species. As Bekoff (2008) states, the privacy of mind argument in

relation to animals constitutes "a poor excuse…for retaining the status quo" (p. 9). In addition, the close physical contact between horse and rider means that both parties are provided with cues about the other's emotional and mental state that may not be available in many other social relationships and may increase the accuracy of inferences riders' make about their horses.

Within participants' constructions of an agentic sporting partner was a fundamental awareness of the inequity of the horse-rider relationship. Although participants described the personal fulfilment horses experienced via equestrian sport, they were aware that the "relative gains" with respect to sporting participation were not equally divided (Hatfield et al., 1985). Interpersonal relationships may depend fundamentally on fairness or as Hatfield et al., (1985) notes, "an equitable exchange of rewards" (p. 92) with imbalances in power causing discomfort. Yet as Bok (2011) writes, the asymmetry of the animal-human relationship does not mean it is inaccurate to speak of a relationship of mutual understanding, nor does asymmetry imply that an abuse of power is inevitable. The complexities of physical and psychological power between horse and rider also meant that control may readily shift between partners, while participants suggested that power is distributed differently in different relationships depending on the horse's personality, intelligence, ability level, and orientation toward humans. Challenging, powerful horses with voices that demanded to be heard drew respect, rather than resentment from participants, and were embraced as an intellectual challenge and often, ideal sporting partners.

Power in relationships is inherently linked to authority and equality (Guerrero et al., 2007) and often associated with control that has destructive outcomes for those being controlled (Tjosvold, 1981). Although power represents a dynamic aspect of human social relationships, with small imbalances not uncommon (cf. Dunbar & Burgoon, 2005), research suggests that egalitarianism promotes satisfaction in intimate human relationships (Guerrero & Andersen, 2000; Hatfield et al., 1985; Steil, 1997; Steil, 2000). Being over-benefited or under-benefited may create a sense of inequity, leading to feelings of guilt in the over-benefited and resentment in the under-benefited (Hatfield et al., 1985). Creating a sense of equality in horse-rider relationships may be partially achieved by positioning horses as minded, powerful, and engaged in sport, constructions that help to negate feelings of distress that may accompany being the relationship partner with an intrinsic interest in sport, while a sense of mutual dependency and reciprocity may be developed through emphasizing the benefits of sport to horses.

The findings of this study suggest that a transactional contract existed between horse and rider whereby the horse was seen as instrumental to the achievement of sporting goals and participants were seen as instrumental in maintaining the horse's well-being, a means, perhaps of reciprocating the horse's sporting efforts (Balkenhol, as cited by Collins, 2006). This exchange system arguably overlooks the risks horse's face through sporting engagement, but ensured that participants' felt they were offering something meaningful in return for the horse's performances. The emphasis participants placed on being responsible toward horses may reflect another means of managing the inequity of horse-rider sporting relationships, with participants taking responsibility for resolving conflicts and training difficulties (McLean & McLean, 2008). This was in keeping with research by Kuhl (2011) in which mushers emphasized their responsibility to care for and understand their sled dogs. Taking a responsible, ethical approach to horse-rider interaction may enhance a rider's sense of relational identity with a prosocial, moral orientation toward horses reinforcing an egalitarian, rather than autocratic, sense of self (Rusbult & van Lange, 2003). Finally, although a sense of equality may be sought-after in close relationships, van Lange et al., (1997) suggest that the reality of relationships may differ markedly from this ideal, and the interpersonal consequences of some inequality may not necessarily be negative. Emphasizing, rather than necessarily achieving perfect horse-rider equality may be instrumental in horse-rider relationships, particularly given the need to exert control and power over a horses, albeit in a fair manner.

Although participants did not endorse a horses-as-objects mentality (Dashper, 2014), and often experienced affectionate relationships with horses, many, but not all participants, distanced themselves from the construction of horse-as-pet, emphasizing instead the work-based nature of the relationship. Although pleasure and companionship (Grier, 2006) may be attributes of the horse-rider relationship, sport horses were not primarily seen in these terms, nor were they associated with the indulgence and favouritism of pet-human relationships (Serpell & Paul, 1994), though they were not understood in purely practical terms as many domestic animals are either. Pets, as Serpell (1986, 1989) points out, may or may not be seen as useful, unless fulfilling the emotional and social needs of humans is seen as carrying economic value; elite sport horses were defined in achievement-based terms, although this did not exclude them from being personally valuable. Amidst the complexity of the horse's status in equestrian sport, it is worth noting that as Arluke (1994) states, "The object/pet dichotomy is built into contemporary society and is behind many vagaries of human-animal interaction" (p. 162), while animals may

play "dual roles" (p. 162), with animals from the same species not uncommonly categorized in diverse, sometimes inconsistent ways.

A number of participants saw an opportunity for the horse to express itself in both physical and relational ways via equestrian sport, resonant with Maslow's (1943) conceptions of self-actualization. Other elite equestrian athletes express similar sentiments, with past Olympian Champion, Klaus Balkenhol (as cited by Collins, 2006, p. 25) stating, "…through my aids, [I] give wings to the horse to move in a more beautiful way." With respect to notions of equine potential, Haraway (2003) analyses the concept of animal happiness outlined by Hearne (2007), in which she notes "human-animal flourishing" occurs out of human and animal becoming "conjoined mortal beings" (p. 52). Argent (2012) has also questioned whether horses may differentiate between work and play in their interaction with humans, noting how focusing on domination and hierarchical social relations can lead to overlooking the possibility that horses, as highly efficient communicators and a species capable of synchronous movement, may find sporting interaction with humans pleasurable.

7.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined how participants minimised the species-gap between horse and rider by describing horses as minded, autonomous, and powerful sporting partners. The voices, opinions, and perspectives of horses were reproduced and represented by participants, creating a sense of equine agency and complex power-exchanges between horse and rider. A sense of the complexity of horse-rider relationships was conveyed in participants' emphasis on the intellectual ability and idiosyncratic qualities of horses, while the loosening of species-barriers led to an emphasis on equality over subordination. Inequality nonetheless pervaded horse-rider interaction, leading participants to emphasize their responsibility toward horses and the need to control horses in an ethical and fair manner. The affectionate and working nature of horse-rider relationships influenced the status accorded to horses, something that will be further considered in Chapter Eight with respect to the horse-rider partnership.

Chapter 8 Partnerships and Relationships in Equestrian Sport

8.1 Introduction

Continuing the discussion of language and its role in horse-rider interaction in equestrian sport, this chapter explores the way the term "partnership" was used by participants to reflect the professional and personal aspects of the horse-rider relationship in the category, 'he knows his job': conceptualising a sporting partnership. A partnership represented a goal-oriented form of interaction, allowing participants to understand and position their relationships with horses as a professional enterprise, but the partnership could also be affectionate and was commonly held as the ultimate horse-rider relationship. How a partnership develops through sporting action is explored in the category, becoming partners through mutual action and goals. The chapter concludes with a discussion of these semantic constructions in context to extant literature.

8.2 Category: "He knows his job": Conceptualising a Sporting Partnership

As well as endorsing the partnership as an accurate descriptor of the horse-rider relationship, participants outlined the defining features of a partnership. First, a partnership meant working together in a goal-oriented fashion as relative equals, with both partners mentally and physically engaged in the tasks of sport. Second, horse-rider partnerships often involved a deep personal attachment, with many participants identifying a partnership as the ultimate form of relationship that could be achieved with a horse in a sporting context. Third, describing the horse-rider relationship as a partnership aligned with participants' identities as professional athletes. Fourth, the partnership gave a more specific sense of what occurred between horse and rider than did simply referring to the horse-rider relationship, though participants sometimes used the two terms loosely and interchangeably and thus the extent to which they denote separate concepts must not be overstated. In addition to these defining features, a number of specific attributes of a partnership were identified, including trust, mutual respect, and understanding.

In a partnership, horse and rider choose to work together to fulfil sporting goals, with this shared focus building an affinity between partners, as Beth enunciates:

> What makes it a partnership I think is the mutual...the desire to form a bond basically, to form a common bond, to work towards a goal and umm you know a desire to, a desire to go forward toward that goal, and we get horses all the

> time that don't want to do what we're asking them to do so naturally that horse is choosing not to be part of the partnership (P136).

Similarly, para-equestrian Emma defined a partnership as "everybody…working towards the same goal," while an ethical and philosophical stance toward horse-rider interaction was inferred in her reference to "a good partnership working ethic" (P128). Whether participants relied upon the term partnership or not, it was clear that their interaction with horses oriented around the concept of jointly undertaken work, with Lara describing a "working relationship" with one of her endurance horses, in which "he knows what I need of him, and he knows what I'm asking and he'll stay with that," (P132) and Kelly characterising her first Grand Prix horse as a horse that "probably would've died trying for you once he realised what the whole thing was about" (P117). Work was central to the horse-rider partnership; of her spirited elite showjumper, Kathy stated, "She really knows her job when she goes out there…so you go, "Okay, you can faff around but as long as you do your job" (P115). A partnership required agency and responsiveness in horses to respond to the rider's direction, while goals and commitment to a common vision were also central. When I asked Amelia what defined a partnership, she responded:

> I think again that level of trust and that respect, understanding, I think there's almost like a goal or an ambition, like anything in any partnership it's sort of there for a reason…there's a goal, there's a driving force and I think that has to be there for the horse and rider as well, I don't know, yeah, I think a partnership is a working together for a common…rather than working against each other, 'cos there's no point me working to clear the jumps or jump the jumps if the horse is looking for a way out (P119).

To what extent may horse and rider share common goals? Despite the emphasis on shared goals in participants' accounts, tension at times was evident around the notion of a goal-oriented partnership, for instance, in addition to stressing the importance of working toward common goals, Beth added with a laugh, "you have to tell the equine partner what that common goal's going to be" (P136), indicating an awareness of the ways in which competitive goals are devised by riders and imposed on horses. In contrast, Matthew did not endorse the idea of shared goals, describing how when sporting failures occur in dyadic sports both partners are "devastated," where a very different dynamic pervades equestrian sport:

> It's not devastating for the horse, couldn't care less...So it comes back to me wanting the horse to do it, me wanting, it's all about me really. Whereas in those [human sporting] partnerships it's all about both of them (P111).

Jane also rejected the idea of shared goals between horse and rider, stating "the horse is doing it purely for the rider…emotionally the horse probably doesn't give a toss" (P107). Understanding equestrian sport as driven by rider aspirations rather than a shared vision between horse and rider disrupted anthropomorphic perceptions of shared work goals, yet for those participants who rejected the notion of shared goals, this did not mean that the interaction between horse and rider did not qualify as a form of partnership. In fact, the lack of intrinsic motivation for horses to participate in sport was often seen as heightening the need for a strong partnership, particularly given the unnatural, stressful environments horses experience in elite sport.

Positioning horses as equal partners with whom one shares a working relationship characterised by mutuality and a sense of consensus around shared sporting pursuits may be critical to the functioning of elite equestrian dyads, just as it may be in human sporting dyads (Tjosvold, 1981; Wickwire et al., 2004). With reference to his two main elite horses, Jim stated, "I have a very clear idea of what we're trying to do and what project we're working on and so do they!" (P111). It is important to recognise the boundaries around participants' understanding of shared goals with horses, however, and to contextualize the emphasis placed on a mutual sporting focus. Participants sought to work together in mutual understanding with their horses, but simultaneously acknowledged the limits to the sharing of goals and work in an interspecies relationship. Melissa, for instance, believed a partnership occurred where "the horse is happy to do what you ask it to do" but she was clear about the extent to which horses understand what is asked of them:

> …not that they probably understand why they get told off say, or corrected for things, they probably don't really "get that" but if you let them know when they do it right "that was really good" they, they're then very happy to do it again…I think the partnership is the horse willing to do what you've asked it to do and it's ears are forward and its eyes are wide and it's happy…you get off of it and…it goes "oh that was good that was fun lets go do it again" (P109).

A shared orientation was also inferred from the horse's ability to choose whether to participate in sport or not:

> They do have a choice, you can't force a twelve-hundred-pound animal to do anything so you know you would sort of think "oh well how can you partner with an animal that you're, you're forcing it to do this?" but you're not really because *the horse has to make the choice to go with you.* …a partnership is the mutual decision to go forward to whatever the goal is (P136).

The behavioural responses horses enacted were used to infer their willingness to engage in certain types of (inter)action and these responses were particularly compelling evidence for a mutual orientation when the horse acted independently of rider commands, as Kathy experienced after making a mistake during a showjumping round:

> Literally I was lying across her neck as she jumped the third part out of the combination and totally did it by herself and like you would, "how could the horse do that," and then it was just funny, I managed to get back into the saddle…the last fence was sorta nine strides on or something and I'd say probably half the field was having it down…and I was pretty much all over her but by the time I got back, was sort of back in the saddle, stirrups back and she just jumped it and I was like, "wow you've kind've saved my arse there!" (P115).

In comparing horses with respect to their willingness to engage in sporting activities, participants were able to conceive of certain horses as accepting their agenda, creating a sense of partnership. Participants understood that sporting pursuits were unnatural to horses although they could also be fulfilling, and thus a horse's willingness to perform signified something important. For Natalie, the partnership with her elite eventer was confirmed after she suffered a fall mid-course but managed to complete the cross-country course despite injuries that left her largely unable to direct her horse:

> I couldn't make him do anything, I was just a little monkey on top, and I couldn't do a thing except in my brain I knew what was coming up and I tried to, tried to help him out as best I could, but basically I couldn't make him do anything, and he just...knew his job and kept on going and carted me around the rest of that track so it was really amazing (P123).

Along similar lines, seven-time Olympic medallist, Hans Gunter Winkler recounted pulling a groin muscle during the cross-country phase of the 1956 Stockholm Olympic

Games. Faced with the necessity of showjumping in order to prevent Germany from being eliminated from contention, Winkler was given a hefty dose of painkillers, from which he developed double-vision and became severely dizzy. He described how his mare, a notoriously difficult ex-steeplechaser, recognised his condition and took charge: "All I could do was guide her to the fences, and when she took off…sit back, crying out with pain" (as cited by Bryant, 2008, p. 160). They finished clear and won both a team and individual gold medal. The willingness of a horse to "take the initiative" (P119) was fundamental to participants' definitions of a partnership and emotionally significant. As Amelia stated, "There's moments where you feel so humbled by the effort the horse has just put in where you think 'oh gosh if I was the horse I just wouldn't have jumped that'" (P119). Feeling supported by a willing, independent, and courageous equine partner created a sense of goodwill toward horses, pivotal to the partnership between horse and rider.

Attending to and focusing on one's partner also constituted evidence of a partnership or lack thereof. Ellen was currently competing a horse she described as "obedient" and "spectacular" but who did not look to her "for information, for help, for support…for direction" (P139), contradicting Ellen's experiences of partnership with other horses. Drawing on the marriage partnership as an exemplar, togetherness and a mutual orientation were central to the equestrian partnership, while sharing the work of equestrian sport necessitated being able to trust one's partner, as the following excerpt from para-equestrian Kate illustrates:

> You could relax with her [Gypsy], whereas with Max, he's very unpredictable so I can never with him (pause) just sort of go out for a walk and just fully...relax like you've always gotta be on the lookout for him like, and yourself, because you never know...not that you're tense, like you relax in your seat but you could never switch off for a while and just ride your horse around… it does umm make a big difference for the partnership-relationship level in that sense 'cos you're not sort of sharing the workload as much (P141).

The idea that trust could lead to a sense of shared work and responsibility between horse and rider was intriguing; Kate experienced a loving relationship with both horses, but the lack of trust and security in her relationship with Max diminished the partnership between them, perhaps particularly because of Kate's physical vulnerability. For some participants a partnership was a performance-oriented affair, with Bruce defining a

partnership as "understanding your horse" in order to "get the best out of it" (P129). In contrast, Amy defined a partnership as "them understanding you and what you're asking and you understanding them and what they're asking" (P143), evoking the perspective of both horse and rider and engaging with the idea of active dialogue between partners.

A personal sense of connection defined many participants' understandings of a partnership. In partnership, horse and rider worked together as one entity, with symbiotic communication, physical synchrony, and an understanding between partners defining what it meant to be in partnership. With her gold medal winning dressage horse, Elisa described having "the feeling that like, yah we could really read each other's mind" (P146), a sentiment many other participants echoed. A partnership represented the ultimate relationship that horse and rider could achieve, with understanding and synergy facilitating both personal and work-related outcomes:

> When you have the two beings completely unified and working together…and understanding each other's weaknesses and understanding each other's strengths…when you have that sort of mutual understanding...that's when you have a partnership (P142).

References were made to the difficulty of capturing in words what the horse-rider partnership meant, and how it is formed and experienced, particularly given its physicality and instinctual qualities, yet while such synchronous relationships may be difficult to describe, they were deeply felt by those who had experienced them. Partnerships were characterised by harmony and euphoria, with such horse-rider interaction described as amongst the best experiences of participants' lives. Crystal described how during a recent harmonious performance she was "smiling the whole time" (P138), while Natalie expressed similar sentiments when describing her behaviour around her former elite horse, Maestro, and Jim referred to his horses as "the most beautiful things in my life" (P110). The intensity of the connection participants experienced with horses was further illustrated by Jim:

> This is…something that is raging between us and and you know it, it's not something we even talk about it, it's just something, the horse will see me coming and it's like it's part of him and he's part of me, we just sort of, umm fold together like a glove (P111).

Partnership was not just a label for the horse-rider relationship; it was an evolving state that had powerful emotional effects on participants, with emotion a natural by-product of realising "that you're in sync with something that's dynamic," (P110). Not only were synergistic performances experienced as exhilarating, participants' relationships with their horses were powerful sources of energy, inspiration, conflict, love, and satisfaction, with participants commonly referring to their horses as their best friend(s), and in some cases, a closer relation than their spouse. In partnership horse and rider contribute to each other's emotional and psychological well-being and thus become intrinsically dependent on and affected by each other. Such partnerships often occurred only with a small number of horses, but once established, played a major role in the emotional and psychological lives of participants. This was such that Melissa even laughingly suggested that her "marriage" (P109) to Monty affected her human relationships:

> It is like a marriage, it really is and [partner's name] is like "Monty, give me a break dude, she's mine!" "Go on the bit properly please!" cos it really affects me, like it really, it affects me a heap (P109).

Other participants also drew an analogy to marriage when describing the teamwork, intimacy, and negotiating that defined the horse-rider partnership, while the exhilaration of achieving a partnership for some transcended the experience of international success. Riding horses may represent the work of many elite riders, but where a partnership develops, the relationship between horse and rider may be experienced as anything but clinical and where sporting success may be transient and inconsistent, the partnership provided an enduring source of fulfilment:

> The partnership feeling is just the greatest feeling in the world...to me, to win a World Games, you know, at that moment that you're standing on that podium, there is no greater feeling, but that lasts this long (gestures with hands). What is enduring and what is so motivating for me is the feeling of developing that partnership and developing that love and developing that trust (P134).

Partnerships were not the only functional form of relationship that could exist between horse and rider in elite sport. Both a working relationship and a partnership involved working together, but unlike a partnership, a working relationship did not encompass a mental connection between partners. In a working relationship, Lara suggested that the horse knows "what I want but he doesn't know what I think" (P132),

while the connection between horse and rider in partnership was such that, "Before I even ask for it she does it" (P132). A working relationship could enable the achievement of sporting outcomes, but only in partnership may something "exquisite" (P110) develop.

Understanding horse-rider interaction as a partnership had implications for participants' identities, especially as a significant number of participants had worked with horses for twenty years or more. Participants had adopted a philosophical stance toward horses that had evolved over time and had been influenced by their relationships with specific horses. Diana had worked for ten years at a large training stable in Germany where horses were considered in commercial terms; "…every horse a number, and a horse has no feeling and a horse is a product you can make money with" (P126). During this time she developed a relationship with a horse whose effect on her she described as "spiritual" (P126), with their relationship a catalyst for learning how to relate to competition horses differently:

> Harry came into my life to really teach me how to have a bond with a horse, how to ahh go in a higher level, not sport but er, spiritual maybe…personally and he taught me so much and he was the one ahh, everything started with Harry (P126).

Diana described how it was Harry who made her "realize 'this is not the way' and especially not my way" (P126), and she believed it was his influence that lead her to "treat all the other horses really different than I had learned in Germany" (P126). This experience led to a shift in Diana's identity as a professional rider, while memories of Harry and their relationship strengthened Diana's resolve to relate to horses as partners rather than products. Taking a partnership orientation to the horse-rider relationship represented an act of self-definition, while by comparing one's own orientation to horses to the approach of others, participants were able to make subtle identity claims. Amelia, for instance, endorsed the partnership as a fitting descriptor of what occurred between horse and rider, but only if the term was used to denote a professional relationship:

> I think it's [the partnership] more than the lovey dovey, lots of kisses and pats sort of thing, it's not that sort of partnership, like it's got to be almost sort of a business partnership, like a working partnership where you have a level of trust and umm and expectation and as long as both parties sort of hold up…I think when I used to think of a partnership you'd think of a "oh isn't that sweet, this

> horse just loves this rider" and I don't really believe that so much, but I think you definitely form an understanding and I think yeah on the cross-country that that horse has gotta know your expectations and it's got to trust the rider and respect the rider enough that when you get in trouble and you're at the end of your reins and there's a jump in front of you it's got to take the initiative and jump so, and I think that is really important (P119).

Redefining the partnership allowed Amelia to uphold a business-oriented image of her interaction with horses, perhaps particularly relevant for a female eventer competing in a largely male-dominated sport where masculine and performance-oriented ideals may be upheld. The identity implications associated with understanding the horse-rider relationship as a partnership was also evident for Amy, who described a partnership in terms of what it denoted about a rider:

> It should be [a partnership], if it's not they don't need to be riding really, that's my opinion, I mean you don't get on the horse and just demand, they're the one doing the work (P143).

Finally, participants endorsed the term partnership as a suitable descriptor of their interaction with horses because the term denoted an inherently positive form of relationship and provided a specific descriptor of what occurred between horse and rider. In contrast to simply referring to a relationship, "partnership" implied a dual-focused form of interaction in which individuals work together, as Tegan notes:

> I would say a partnership is probably stronger than a relationship, I mean, you can have, I have a lot of relationships with horses…and I can have good relationships with horses and bad relationships with horses. I would say, more with a partnership you're more in the positive realm, it's really, like I said you're working together, you know. When you just have a relationship, you're not necessarily, you don't always have to have to work together with someone in a relationship! (P142).

A relationship implied a general knowledge of the other, but did not imply that individuals worked together, while some participants argued that forming a relationship was a necessary stepping stone to developing a partnership:

> A relationship is (pause) you and I have a form of relationship, I have a relationship with my brother, I have a relationship with my father, but we don't necessarily work in partnership to do things. With the horse and the lunger, the way that you work together to enhance the overall, it's what makes it a partnership. Umm, so, it's, you can have...positive relationships without them being partnerships, but you could never have a partnership without the existence of a relationship (P144).

Jessica too, contrasted the gamut of relationships that may exist with the specificity of a partnership:

> There's all sorts of relationships out there, there's good relationships and bad relationships and relationships that have no trust and some that do and so I think a partnership is really a relationship that has the trust and commitment to be working together not against each other (P137).

Working a horse for a period of time for the purpose of competitive riding was a common prerequisite to developing a partnership, where relationships were considered in more ubiquitous terms. Matthew believed a partnership began as soon as horse and rider started training together, but noted that he did not have a relationship with horses that were sent to him to train for just "three weeks" (P111), suggesting that the purpose of horse-rider interaction also determined whether a partnership developed, a point Diana also addressed:

> With Harry I had a real partnership and er, with some horses I have ah, like a relationship, I know, they are in my stable, I have to train them so they can be sold, they have to be sold and I think there is a difference, of course you treat the horses also well, you be good for them, they go on the field, you pat them, you give them everything they need but you know (pause) they are on a different purpose in my stable (P126).

Mutual understanding was fundamental to the partnership between horse and rider. Participants had worked with a range of horses across their careers, and as outlined in Chapter Seven they got to know these horses as individuals, particularly when they intended to work a horse for a period of time for competitive purposes. Forming an understanding sometimes required adjusting one's behaviour to accommodate the horse's

relationship preferences, while in strong partnerships, participants were confident making claims about the mutual understanding that defined their relationship. For instance, when I asked Tegan to describe how she acted toward her mare, Sage, she exclaimed, "Oh the same, it's the same…we have that, mutual friendship" (P142) suggesting that to know how she felt about Sage was to know how Sage felt about Tegan. Mutual confidence was also central to the horse-rider relationship, as Kathy describes:

> The horse has to, you know, be confident that you're not going to ask them to do anything that they're not sort of physically you know, trained and prepared for, and mentally I suppose able to cope with as well, and yeah that's the same thing, you know, you've got to go, "I've given the horse the best opportunity to do this and I've got to trust that it's going to try for me as well," and that you know can be quite a fragile thing (P115).

Reciprocity was important for participants in developing an understanding of their relationships with horses. While participants acknowledged that horses varied in their responsiveness toward humans, they nonetheless looked for signs that suggested what, if any, significance they held in their horse's eyes, particularly when they believed a strong connection existed. Beth described her elite competition horse as "very standoffish" (P136), but with her he was affectionate and sought contact, which she took as evidence of "a bond" (P136). Reciprocity was also indicated, as Ellie noted, in both horse and rider being prepared to "give your equal share and…take care of one another" (P131). This was something that Jim was also clear about, speaking here about what his horses could expect from him:

> They know that I'm going to make real accurate calls with them and if they make a mistake umm then I'll be trying to umm reach out and and haul them out of there, and ahh with everything I've got….vice versa, if I make a mistake I know they will cover for me with everything they've got. Holy hell, that's called a partnership if ever there's one (P111).

The partnership was also evident when the horse did not "hold a grudge" (P120) in the event that the rider made a mistake, suggesting that anthropomorphic assertions may facilitate a sense of partnership. In the trajectory of significant horses in elite rider's careers, the horse with whom the rider first became competitive was commonly signalled

as a particularly important relationship because of the tolerance, goodwill, and partnership that defined the relationship.

Trust was perhaps the most dominant feature of a horse-rider partnership and in its absence, sporting performances were much more challenging. Of several horses on whom she had previously vaulted, Jessica stated, “Even on the ground leading them round I didn’t trust them; up on their backs I didn’t know when they were going to be out from underneath me” (P137). A lack of trust created doubt, uncertainty, and hesitation, and appeared disruptive of the experience of flow that defines superlative performances and partnerships. The ability to anticipate the horse’s bodily movements facilitated a trusting relationship, creating a sense of security and confidence, yet trust was a fragile part of the horse-rider partnership. Participants made the choice to trust horses amidst uncertainty, as Claudia’s account suggests:

> It’s hard to fully trust your horse because....the horses have to get experience somehow and sometimes they don’t always like...go perfectly well (laughs) so it is hard to fully trust, especially when you’re...you know, doing handstands and stuff! but yah...I like to trust my horse going into a competition (P140).

Participants were aware of the danger of interacting with a large, physically strong, reactive animal. Trust between horse and rider may be a powerful counterpoint to anxiety in equestrian sport (Tenenbaum et al., 2002) as well as feelings of vulnerability. Participants made the decision to trust horses, but trust was also a matter of degree rather than an all-or-nothing phenomenon. Claudia was aware, for instance, that the horses with whom she vaults are not automatons, but working effectively with horses as a vaulter required a trusting orientation. As McAllister (1995) notes, if certainty existed, the need to trust would not, with trust-related decisions made based on available knowledge. Working with horses for significant periods of time enhanced the predictability of horse-rider interaction, which in turn facilitated the formation of trust, as Jane states:

> If you’re riding the same horse, say a Grand Prix horse, you’ll probably ride that same horse for ten years and you do get to know everything about the way they feel and the way they think and the way they’re going to react to something and you can predict what’s going to happen (P107).

For some participants, trust was so closely linked to a partnership that the two bordered on synonymous. Mutual respect and awareness of the other’s emotional

boundaries were also features of a partnership. Respect meant being both firm and fair toward each other, for instance, Elisa defined a partnership as "respect[ing] each other's character, but that you also can be straight to each other if the other one makes a mistake" (P146). A number of dimensions of the horse-rider partnership have been outlined, yet the partnership in some respects remained elusive and indeterminate, with participants suggesting that once defined in concrete language, the construct lost some of its meaning. Jim, for instance, noted how partnerships exist outside the parameters of human language and "below the normal person's screen" (P110), while Georgina's description of the partnership as a "vibration" (P134) carried similar overtones. The intangibility of the connection between horse and rider was understood by Diana as a combination of chemistry, spirituality, and destiny, a product of powerful, but difficult-to-quantify elements. Further to this, Jim stated:

> …a lot of this stuff, like once upon a time you talked about confidence, you know, no one would have recognised confidence as a major thing, well today, everyone understands confidence. Well you can't see it, it's an intangible thing but you can sure see the prints left in the snow of someone who's lost their confidence, so you know, that's a good example in this day and age of umm of you know, mankind recognising that aspect of psychology if you like. And no one questions, everyone understands it [confidence] but it is an intangible thing. I would say where that emotion and that wording and definition of confidence comes, there are probably thousands of other aspects of life that no one's got up on a screen and identified and you know, and really, you don't see it [the partnership] but it is definitely there (P111).

One aspect of the partnership that was particularly difficult to speak about was the personal connection between horse and rider. Of her former dressage horse, Diana stated "he was just like another part of me and I can't find the right words to describe that" (P126) and while the relationship Diana had with her current dressage horse was significant, it did not carry the same meaning:

> This horse that I have here now, I think he is amazing and I really do love him, but he has a totally different character and Harry was for me, yah he was my friend, my husband, my children, my everything together (P126).

Partnerships were not produced by following any given recipe, nor did they necessarily follow the laws of social interaction. As Georgina pointed out, in some instances a partnership was borne of a "similar temperament" but the opposite pattern could also occur, making it difficult to anticipate between whom a partnership would develop. For many participants, what occurred in partnership with horses was experienced as instinctual, and as Lucy suggested, the stronger one's instinct for horses, the more likely a partnership is to develop. Given the role of meta-knowledge in social relationships (Finkenauer & Righetti, 2011), it may perhaps be particularly difficult to define what occurs in an interspecies relationship where one member of the relationship is not able to contribute to relational dialogue using spoken language. Furthermore, wherever a certain phenomenon is closely linked to feelings and emotions, semantic difficulties may arise, while the tactile nature of horse-rider interaction may increase the difficulty of describing what occurs between horse and rider.

The concept of feel conveyed some of the subtleties of attunement, as well as the psychological and the physical features of what occurs between horse and rider, as Lucy describes:

> It's a softness and it's the movement of the horse underneath you, it's actually a physical feel but it's also...a feel also takes on what you're, not what you're actually feeling but what's happening in the big picture (P130).

As Brandt (2005, p. 76) notes, "Because feel is embodied, it is a difficult concept to explain linguistically." The partnership was similarly intuitive and instinctual in nature. If "feel" is experienced via embodiment and is, as Brandt (2005) argues, a product of empathy, then the historic privileging of mind over body and reason over emotion may contribute to the difficulty of bringing experiences of the body into the intellectual realm of the mind, where logic and reason are often privileged over sensory experience. Nonetheless, bringing such concepts into intellectual discourse may serve an important role in reinforcing the validity of embodied experiences and knowledge.

8.2.1 Code: Becoming Partners through Sporting Action

Some common pathways to developing a partnership were described. Time, effort, and engaging in sport together were pivotal, with the latter objective in particular considered critical. As Ethan put it:

> When you put that much trust in horse, you put so much in them around those four-star tracks, I really did ride him around that four-star that I won and enjoyed every second of it, it was like he knew what I was thinking (P113).

Lara described how quickly she formed relationships with her endurance horses as a result of simply riding them for so many miles, noting how a bond formed out of the risks, excitement, and time involved in endurance riding. Kelly, too, saw competitive riding as pivotal to relationship development:

> I think every horse that you get to Grand Prix is definitely, ahh to work a horse through to Grand Prix, you have to have a special relationship... I would certainly say any horse you compete to FEI level, you would have a close one [relationship] (P117).

This view corroborates that of renowned horse trainer, Ernst Hoyos (as cited by Collins, 2006) who endorsed the view that “a partnership” (p. 66) develops through the process of pursuing Grand Prix level riding. The connection and understanding between horse and rider not only developed in the saddle, but was most evident during training and competitive activities, as Ethan describes:

> You see it [the partnership] more when you’re riding them you know, because I can’t even explain what my aids are when I’m riding these horses say in the dressage arena, cross-country’s a better example, because it feels honestly like I’ve said, like they’re doing what you’re thinking, you know, so it’s a real partnership (P113).

The formation of a partnership followed one of two possible trajectories, an immediate psychological connection between horse and rider, or a gradually developing bond that required time and effort to develop, as Hannah notes:

> My Junior National Team horse, he was a nice horse and I liked him from the start, but we had to build that relationship and ahh build you know, after a lot

> of kilometers and stuff…but sometimes like with the horse that I brought here now, it was just, from the start, I was crazy about him and he was crazy about me. It was sort of, just, there, and then from there it built into so much more than with the other horses (P125).

Tegan also differentiated between immediate and slowly developing relationships, but noted that even in instances where an immediate connection is present, time is still required to develop a strong, understanding-centred partnership. Hannah and Elisa had both experienced relationships with horses that transcended anything else they had experienced, but they were aware of the need to partner a range of horses to be successful. While an immediate connection expedited the process of building a partnership, flexibility and building partnerships with different horses was important:

> It's like with people eh, you have the first click or not. If you have the first click it's so much easier because then ahh, you accept much more from your horse. If it makes a mistake you think "Ahh doesn't matter, he tries hard." If you don't like him, and he makes a mistake you think "See, I already thought it's gonna be like this," so that makes it harder so that's why I think it's very important that you match in the first ahh thing, and then yah, you have to learn to know the character of your horse and every horse is different and I think that's the nice thing, that every horse is different and you have to work every horse in a different way (P146).

Yet contrary to an emphasis on compatibility, logistical and financial constraints often led to partnerships driven by the horse's ability, rather than innate horse-rider compatibility and in some instances, the development of a partnership depended on the rider's ability to accept incompatibility and less-than-ideal qualities in their equine partner. Becoming partners hinged in part on the decision to form a partnership with a suitable horse. Indeed, Ethan suggested almost guiltily that the strongest bonds were often formed with the most successful horses:

> I'll tell you something a little controversial but this, we're all competitive right, and probably it comes with, you know we say the special ones, partnership, but they're probably the good ones you know so (pause) I know this mare stepped up recently and won a big show up in [city name] and umm since then the whole yard's been treating her a little bit

> differently, she's a bit special all of a sudden, and I think that's got a lot to do with it to be honest (P113).

Where an amateur rider may have the relative luxury of relating to and riding only those horses with whom they are naturally compatible, elite horse-rider partnerships are both borne and made and, as Jim explained, experiencing a naturally conducive partnership early in one's career may inhibit a rider's ability to "make" (P110) partnerships in less ideal circumstances:

> I think the better you are as a rider, the more you're able to, if you come across a horse that's got talent you just have to be more flexible and you don't try and assert yourself on the horse. I think there is such a thing as a horse that's very compatible with that particular person because that horse needs somebody aggressive or that horse needs somebody very sensitive and that person is naturally aggressive or naturally sensitive so that works but I think if you're really good then you need to recognise what the horse is because these days if I'm on a good horse then I'll fall in love with it you know (P110).

Jim's reference to falling in love with "good horse[s]" implies the pragmatism of relationship development in an elite context, while a flexible appraisal of the partnership could also enhance competitiveness. While participants often expressed a preference for certain types of horses, they also needed to work different horses as professional riders, as Abbey notes:

> In business you'll find yourself riding a few different types of horses, but in the ultimate sport I know what type of horse suits me and I'll stick to this model (P127).

Rather than developing a relationship before beginning to pursue elite sport, the partnership developed out of sporting engagement, with participants often using sporting achievements as a way of gauging their relationships with horses, as Kathy describes:

> For me realistically it [the partnership] begins with…an event or a circumstance where they exceed your expectations and suddenly you just go, "Wow, you've got something extra or special," and through that then you go, well I've got, I've developed a partnership with this horse (P115).

Sporting pursuits provided a framework and pathway for relationship building, signalling the need for mutual trust and confidence and providing a forum through which to evaluate horse-rider relationships. The partnership also fluctuated with competitive pressures, as Claire describes:

> With this mare, yeah about maybe six months in from when I rode her, definitely had it [a partnership] then for another six months, I've lost it for a while, I had it back before this event, I'm going to lose it for a bit more now, like as she goes up [competition grades] she's just going to feel the pressure, I have to give her time to cope with the pressure (P120).

As Claire's narrative suggests, sporting action influences the trajectory of the partnership. Trust, mutual knowing and respect, communication, and commitment to engage together in sport were analysed, developed, and sometimes fractured through sporting action. Competitive success may motivate a rider to develop a relationship with their horse, thus partnerships may be strengthened and refined as a product of successful sporting action. On the other hand, flaws in the relationship between horse and rider may also be revealed and even exacerbated in competitive circumstances, as evidenced by Elisa's description of her current dressage horse as dominant and untrustworthy. After seven years of riding him competitively, it was still difficult for Elisa to "get a connection" (P146) with the horse and equally hard "to do things together, he in the competition easily forgets I'm there as well" (P146). The pressure of the competition environment created the perfect conditions for weaknesses in the partnership, or a complete lack of partnership, to emerge. As Elisa indicated, "In a competition that's where they can, if they want to be against you, that's the place to do it" (P146), while Crystal enunciated a similar point:

> I've seen people not necessarily have great partnerships with their horses and it never works…it always at some point backfires and you've seen it even here [international competition] not naming any names but certain horses that have just had enough of what they were doing and being treated, they usually do it in the ring…you know at the worst moment for the rider and they finally say, "You know what? I've had enough of this" (P138).

The achievement of a partnership was not an all-or-nothing process and as Heidi noted, "every test you do reminds you or tells you of the things you need to be doing better at home" (P133). Kathy thought that the trust between her and one of her horses had been

repaired after a difficult experience, only to discover at a competition that the relationship remained fractured and more time and effort were required to restore the damage. Conversely, after making a mistake at the beginning of a freestyle test, Jane was reminded of the strength of her partnership with Fred when she began to make up the test as she rode, with the resilience and trust underlining their relationship evident in Fred's calm response. This defining performance brought home how strong their partnership was:

> I could throw things at him with no warning and he just did it. If you didn't have that trust and you throw something at them and they go, "Oh hey what are you doing?" There was not a second when he said, "What are you doing?" he just went, yeah, under pressure it was really clear that he trusted me because otherwise it would have been just a complete disaster (P107).

Given the variety of factors that participants identified as influencing performance outcomes, however, competitive results were not always treated as a reflection of the partnership. Moreover, spending time together outside of the sporting context also facilitated relationship development in unique ways. Although participants often competed horses after just short periods working together, they emphasized how partnerships characterised by mutual understanding, trust, respect, and a shared agenda took time to develop, as Amelia notes:

> I think everyone would like to think that they can get a partnership together quite quickly, but I think all the aspects of partnership that I've just talked about are, umm take time, like you don't build a respect quickly and you don't build that trust quickly (P119).

With time and sustained contact, a close relationship often developed naturally. As Kelly noted, "I don't think you can help but have a close relationship with all of them, I think any one that you've ridden for a few months" (P117), while other participants suggested that mutual understanding between horse and rider became "almost instinctive" (P132) over time. Effort was required to develop and maintain a partnership, even where an immediate connection existed. Even participants who saw themselves as possessing a strong ability to form relationships with horses, such as Georgina, described the challenges of forming a partnership:

> You try and you try and you get nowhere for a long time, you just get that glassy eye back at you and a horse isn't yours, you haven't got into his territory and he's not into yours…mental territory, umm and things sorta happen along the way, after the bad things, when you start thinking, "I think I'm getting through," and you just feel them start to trust you (P134).

While participants emphasized taking time to establish strong partnerships, a number of participants were nonetheless working and competing horses they had only been associated with for a short period of time. Thus the emphasis on needing time to develop a partnership often contradicted the actual behaviour of participants, and as well as this, in some respects contradicted the need to quickly develop competition- and training-oriented short-term partnerships. Catch-riding practices, discussed by Bruce and evidenced in the successes of elite riders such as Mark Todd, suggest that performances may be elicited in the absence of an established partnership, as Bruce suggested, or that very talented riders are able to establish sufficiently trusting partnerships in short periods of time.

8.3 Discussion of Findings:

This chapter has outlined how the horse-rider partnership implies a shared, professional work agenda and a sporting relationship that may be emotionally as well as professionally significant. Participants' identifed a "partnership" as a fitting descriptor of horse-rider interaction and as an aspirational ideal for equestrian dyads, with working together and experiencing a close bond defining characteristics of the partnership. In addition, mutual respect, trust, and communication were central to the partnership, corroborating Wipper's (2000) findings on horse-rider partnerships in eventing and Keaveney's (2008) research on horses as companions. These findings also provide support for Gilbert and Gillett's (2013) research on polo-players in which a partnership developed through sporting action, and McCormick and McCormick's (1997) research on the role of partnerships in equine psychotherapy. Participants in the current study defined the "partnership" in similar language to those participants in Smart's (2011) research on professional riders, with mutual trust and respect identified in both studies as key dimensions of the partnership.

Describing horse-rider relationships as a form of partnership reflected the working-, rather than leisure-orientation of horse-rider interaction in elite sport and the mutual focus on sporting goals that participants considered fundamental to being in partnership. Such

constructions do not exclude the possibility of an intimate personal attachment between horse and rider, however, and therefore referring to the partnership allowed participants to contextualize and define their relationships with horses along the personal-professional relational continuum in accordance with their personal orientation toward equestrian sport. Narratives of partnership may also represent a way of distancing the self from narratives of equine domination, which although historically romanticised in cowboy narratives (Brandt, 2005) are now, particularly in light of the natural horsemanship movement, considered a less than appropriate relationship model. Indeed, participants referred to "domination" cautiously and thoughtfully, and sometimes with a measure of discomfort, carefully navigating what seemed almost "a dirty word" in context to horse-rider interaction.

Being in partnership reflected an emphasis on doing things together and acting as a unit, while having a partnership with a horse represented the highest form of horse-rider attachment that could be achieved in a sporting context, an archetypal union characterised by symbiotic understanding, capable of generating euphoric, emotional reactions. Some participants concentrated heavily on the business-nature of a partnership, but most also described a relationship of deep personal attachment and love, corroborating Dashper's (2015) findings regarding the horse-rider relationship in an amateur sporting context. While participants sometimes used the terms "relationship" and "partnership" interchangeably, and overlap clearly existed between terms, it was clear that semantic differences mattered, even where they are subtle. In his autobiography, Fox-Pitt (2009) says of his relationship with his Olympic horse, Tamarillo, "…we have a partnership rather than a relationship; I'm very fond of him and we have a mutual respect" (p. 123). While participants did not discount the horse-rider relationship, references to being in partnership more fully encapsulated the interaction between horse and rider that took place in a sporting context.

Emphasizing shared goals may help to create a sense of teamwork and mutual focus between horse and rider that facilitates relationship development and encourages strong sporting performances. Research on goal setting in human team sports has revealed that shared goals may positively influence team satisfaction, cohesion, and performance (Brawley, Carron, & Widmeyer, 1993), with cohesion in particular developing as a result of a greater shared focus between athletes (Senécal, Loughead, & Bloom, 2008; Widmeyer & Ducharme, 1997), while cohesion has also been linked to satisfaction in sporting teams (cf. Fisher, Mancini, Hirsch, Proulx, & Staurowsky, 1982). Thinking "dyadically" (Berscheid, 1999) has been identified as an important aspect of reciprocity in dyadic

sporting relationships, with the perceptions dyad members hold about each other, termed their co-orientation (Newcomb, 1953), influencing their relationships (cf. Jowett, 2006; Jowett, 2007b).

Although it may not be possible to ascertain the actual degree of empathic accuracy between horse and rider, the emphasis participants placed on shared knowledge and understanding underscores the potential relevance of the concept of co-orientation for equestrian dyads, consistent with the findings of a number of studies on co-orientation in human sporting dyads (cf. Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Meek, 2000). A sense of understanding in social relationships has also been linked to pleasure at goal attainment (Righetti, Finkenauer, & Rusbult, 2011) meaning that understanding between horse and rider may enhance experiences of personal and sporting achievements in equestrian sports. Furthermore, while participants may appear to speak anthropomorphically when they infer a shared work agenda between horse and rider, as Zohar and Ginossar (1998) note, the behaviour of horses may readily appear goal-oriented because most animal behaviours are adaptive and therefore are in fact, goal-oriented.

The term partnership has been used to describe the marital bond as a relationship between equals (Katz, 1998), it also carries direct connotations of a business relationship (Mohr & Spekman, 1994), and has been used in a variety of contexts to suggest a collaborative relationship in which parties from different domains work together as equals (Campbell, Dienemann, Kub, Wurmser, & Loy, 1999). In a business context, Mohr and Spekman (1994) describe the partnership as a cooperative and strategic working relationship formed to ensure a competitive advantage and defined by coordination, commitment, interdependence, and trust. With respect to health care provision, Campbell et al., (1999) describe professionals coming together in partnership to provide collaborative care built on trust and mutual goals, while with respect to decision-making processes between medical professionals, Charles, Whlan, and Gafni (1999) juxtapose paternalistic styles of interaction with those made in partnership, implying that an egalitarian form of social interaction occurs “in partnership”. Interestingly, despite the diversity of contexts in which the term “partnership” is enacted here, these definitions align with many of those offered by participants in the current study.

Talking about partnerships created a niche for describing horse-rider interaction as a form of work, and such references may reflect an important aspect of the social world of equestrian sport (Crosset & Beal, 1997) serving to reinforce equestrianism as a legitimate career and form of social enterprise dually entered into by horse and rider. Indeed, Crosset

and Beal (1997) note how "common channels of communication" (p. 81) as well as shared activities and perspectives, come to define social worlds and even (sporting) subcultures (Yinger, 1960), with ways of relating to horses and talking about horse-rider relationships reproduced and negotiated within these sub-worlds. Indeed, even the horse's work ethic was implicated in definitions of partnership, in keeping with research by Keaveney (2008), with participants using their horse's willingness to work as an indicator of the strength of their relationship.

Partnerships were not always easy to speak about and were experienced as instinctual and embodied, corroborating the reports of Brandt's (2005) female research participants, who described a profound experience of "interembodiment" (p. 10) with horses, a momentary experience of complete unity devoid of species boundaries. Partnerships also implied a mind-reading process between horse and rider that integrates both social and cognitive capacities (Bermudez, 2011). Participants described the ability of horses to recognise and respond to the rider's emotional state, along similar lines to the "emotive discourse" between humans and animals outlined by Gubrium (1986). This provides further evidence for the contention drawn by Sanders and Arluke (1993) that, contrary to traditional symbolic interactionist contentions, horses may be able to "take the role of the other" and engage with the subjective experience of humans. It also corroborates Evans and Franklin's (2010) argument for the horse-person unit that may occur when a "syncretic" leap brings individuals into a state of profound partnership achieved through embodied training.

Many of the elite riders interviewed had experienced a sense of deep attunement with their horses that may reflect the construct of emotional contagion, defined by Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson (1994) and considered by Hama et al., (1996) as an explanation for why horses appear able to discriminate between individuals according to their attitudes toward horses. The experiences of participants provide support for past research that has demonstrated the presence of physical and possibly emotional synchronicity between horse and rider using heart rate synchronisation tests (Peham et al., 2001) and by examining the consistency of motion patterns between horse and rider (Argent, 2012). That the ultimate form of connection between horse and rider in elite sport involved a deep unity between horse and rider places narratives of interpersonal intimacy, unity, and emotion inside the performance domain of elite sport, a context in which relationships are typically seen as secondary to performance outcomes (cf. Jowett & Meek, 2000) and emotion may be seen antithetical to cognitive abilities (Hays, 2012). This

dimension of a partnership between horse and rider also challenges, as Brandt (2005) points out, the self/other dualism of Western discourses, with horse and rider together negotiating a shared physicality and, it may be argued, a shared identity forged through synchronicity.

Participants used their sporting participation as a way of evaluating their relationships with horses, in keeping with Keaveney's (2008) findings, though time away from competitive riding was also critical to developing a partnership. As Argent (2010) suggests, the depth and breadth of horse-rider relationships may depend on the extent of their interaction and what is asked physically of the horse, with trust and mutual understanding increasingly important as the challenges of the interaction increase. The emphasis on becoming partners through sporting action provided support for research by Knijnik (2013) and Coulter (2013) on dressage and showjumping riders respectively, in which the connection between horse and rider is mediated and produced by the nuances of specific sporting practices. In his case study of a Brazilian dressage rider, Knijnik (2013) describes how formal dressage training became increasingly important to the connection and development of a relationship between horse and rider over time. Participants in the current study described using feedback from performance outings, including but not limited to, the outcome of the competition and the horse's behaviour at the competition, as indicators of the status of the partnership, with the pressure of competition providing a test of the partnership.

Partnerships involved trust, a construct that may have profound implications for relationship quality (Couch & Jones, 1997; Gurtman, 1992) and, as Ingold (1994, p. 13) puts it, suggests "a peculiar combination of *autonomy* and *dependency*" (italics original) in relationships. Although trust between horse and rider was established based on participants' attributions about and observations of their horses' behaviour, trust by definition involved a leap of faith (Brownlie & Howson, 2005), something participants expressed varying levels of cognisance of, with some expressing absolute faith in their horses and others advocating for the importance of trust even in situations of uncertainty. As Murray and Holmes (1997) contend, knowledge about social partners and relationships experienced with them are not static, thus unpredictability always pervades trusting relationships, and this may be particularly so in horse-human relationships (Billings et al., 2012), given the sensitive and unpredictable nature of horses (Kiley-Worthington, 2005; Wipper, 2000). Participants also described the ease with which trust was lost, supporting

McKernan's (2003) argument for the fragility of trust between horse and rider, while time and sustained contact were required to build trust (Robinson, 1999).

Trust as a construct has been linked to and found relevant for a broad range of social relationships, from highly personal, intimate relationships (cf. Murray & Holmes, 1997) to relationships in organisational settings (cf. McAllister, 1995), making it particularly relevant to equestrian dyads, whose relationships contain both personal and professional dimensions. Trust has been identified as a highly important part of coordinated action and relationships in organisational settings (Thompson, 1967) where, like equestrian sports, a performance-orientation and an emphasis on accomplishing tasks is paramount (McAllister, 1995). Care and concern for another, even in the context of business-oriented relationships, may provide important grounds upon which to build a trusting relationship, with research revealing that affect-based and cognition-based trust are both implicated in work-oriented relationships (McAllister, 1995). In keeping with Ingold's (1994) sentiments, participants described trust as a belief in reciprocity, fairness, and acting selflessly when required. The amount of contact between horse and rider was also relevant to the development of trust (Keaveney, 2008), while relational autonomy could be inferred from the emphasis on trust between partners, with Ingold (1994) suggesting that trust does not exist in coercive relationships because the denial of volition to one's partner lessens the need for it.

Participants also described mutual respect as critical to a partnership and this involved recognising each other's boundaries, negotiating these boundaries, recognising the horse as an agentic partner, and knowing the horse would accept and respond to the rider's commands. These findings provide support for Wipper (2000) and McKernan's (2003) contentions around the importance of mutual respect in horse-rider relationships, and also those of Kuhl (2011) in relation to human-sled dog relationships, in which it is argued that shared, mutual work activities may create a deep-set appreciation for the abilities and "work ethic" (p. 27) of animals who participate in physically demanding tasks with humans. Finally, time and contact were deemed important to partnership development, yet given the success that has been observed between elite riders in short-term partnerships with horses, it seems possible that Phillips (2013) is correct when he contends that horses are remarkably adaptive and readily able to form new bonds with new equine or human companions, while as dressage trainer, Ernst Hoyos (as cited by Collins, 2006), suggests, perhaps "a good rider can feel his way into a horse very quickly" (p. 54). Participants emphasized the time it took to build a partnership, while competing horses

after only a short period together appeared to carry certain risks, yet it may be that highly skilled riders are able to quickly establish trusting partnerships that are sufficiently strong enough to lead to strong performances. Interestingly, several participants noted how the development in their riding skills over time had fostered their ability to elicit performances in the absence of a partnership, a temptation that participants tried to avoid as this was seen as successful in the short-term, but not when competing horses for longer periods of time.

8.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has described the working, but also sometimes deeply personal nature of the horse-rider partnership, with trust, communication, and mutual respect and understanding at the heart of an ideal partnership. It has also addressed how sporting action, time, and sustained effort facilitate the development of a partnership. Although descriptors of horse-rider interaction may be used interchangeably and the differences between terms appear fluid in nature, the partnership denoted a specific, positive form of social relationship in which horse and rider worked together and thus represented an appropriate means of describing horse-rider relationships in a sporting context, though it was not always an easy construct to define or describe. The influence of horse-rider partnerships on the sporting performance of equestrian dyads has been touched upon here, but it is to this issue that we will turn in Chapter Nine.

Chapter 9 Symbiosis, or Sporting Tool? Competition and the Horse-Rider Relationship

9.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the implications of the horse-rider relationship for the competitiveness of elite equestrian dyads. Participants identified three ways of understanding the connection between sporting performance and the horse-rider relationship: as pivotal to success, non-essential to success, or as antithetical to success. This depended on the sporting context/discipline and the participant's orientation to equestrian sport, while participants shifted between these conceptions, expressing nuanced, sometimes ambivalent attitudes with respect to the connection between performance success and relationships in sport. Participants described success in fluid terms, differentiating between intrinsic and extrinsic markers of competitive success. These constructions and issues will be explored in the category, a blessing and a burden: bonding and being competitive, while the code investing emotionally: managing emotional (de)attachment to horses will consider how emotions and (de)attachment impact upon competitiveness. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of these findings. Participants used the terms "relationship" and "partnership" interchangeably when describing the connection between performance success and the bond between horse and rider, and thus the following analyses draws upon both terms.

9.2 Category: A Blessing and a Burden: Bonding and Being Competitive

Experiencing a strong horse-rider relationship defined the involvement of some participants in equestrian sport and was viewed as critical to their performance success. Jessica, for instance, saw the partnership *as* equestrian sport, noting "if you don't have a partnership with your horse then it's not really an equestrian sport, the horse is just an object that you're on" (P137). Georgina echoed similar sentiments, stating, "I don't know how you do it [the sport] without [a partnership]" (P136), while Jim described the partnership as synonymous with being successful and fundamental to the authenticity of equestrianism, noting:

> The thing that stops the sport from becoming commercial though, is that you can't *fake* that, like it has to be a partnership in that you have to throw your whole soul into it, you can't say, "Oh trust me trust me" and really to yourself

> think "No way"…if you say to a horse "Trust me" it's got to be that you've thrown yourself into the…zone without reservation…so it takes part of your life. And so producing horses at the top, it could be a lucrative business, but you only have so much life, you can't produce it like a sausage factory, it does that to your soul and so that stops the whole industry from becoming commercial because every horse produced out there are little bits of people's souls (P110).

Participants used the physical challenges of certain equestrian sports to conceptualise the importance of a relationship between horse and rider to sporting success, illustrated here by former eventer and current showjumping rider, Lucy:

> We're going to go out and jump that World Championship cross-country course out there, you want a pretty jolly good partnership with it and the same with those big jumps [rider's name] is going to jump; you want a pretty jolly good partnership with your horse (P130).

While Hannah struggled to see how she could be competitive against other endurance riders for whom horses carried little value, she nonetheless endorsed the partnership as important because of the large periods of time horse and rider spend together in relative isolation on course during which "sometimes you carry the horse and sometimes he carries you" (P125). Unlike fellow endurance rider, Lara, Hannah saw catch-riding as deleterious to performances:

> It's also very difficult to umm compete overseas with us because it's very difficult to take our horses abroad and then we have to hire horses and it's not the same, you don't know the horse and he doesn't know you, and it's just (pause) you have to understand each other (P125).

Whether the relationship between horse and rider was seen as influencing sporting outcomes depended on how the partnership between horse and rider was conceived and understood. For Hannah, an ideal partnership was reciprocal and fair (P125), yet she differentiated between affection-based and more mercenary forms of partnership in endurance riding, suggesting that "working together," a form of partnership, was necessary for endurance riding, but this did not mean horse-rider interaction was "nice" (P125) or even ethical. Other participants defined the partnership in more straightforward ways,

linking it to a sense of teamwork and mutual focus between horse and rider that naturally facilitated sporting success and enhanced performances, as Grace illustrates:

> It only works if the horse is working with you; if they start to work against you or if, if they are not trusting you I don't think you're ever going to look as bright and shiny when you compete (P135).

As well as contributing to performance success, a strong horse-rider relationship may be fundamental to avoiding sporting failures of the most lethal nature. A failure to engender the horse's goodwill could have serious consequences for not just performance outcomes but horse-rider safety, as Grace suggests:

> …it's [the horse] the stronger animal, that's for sure. It will win once it's against you so you so you better, don't have six hundred kilos against you, you better work with them, you know (P135).

Although some equestrians appear able to successfully compete on horses with whom they are not familiar, participants emphasized knowing their horses well as a form of competitive currency, with the more time spent together, the better. While many participants conceived a range of possible relationships as potentially successful, including those of competition-oriented riders who viewed horses as objects, to achieve longevity and the highest echelons of sporting performance and "bring up multiple horses over long periods of time" (P142) partnerships were necessary. Performances could occur in the absence of a partnership, but as Elizabeth noted, to "excel…become more brilliant" (P124) required a partnership. Kelly endorsed the potential for elite performances to occur regardless of the status of the horse-rider relationship, noting, "I'm sure if you asked all the Grand Prix riders to swap horses I'm sure they would all be capable of swapping horses and riding a Grand Prix test" (P117), but believed that "effective, top-level [horse-rider] combination[s]" (P117) possessed strong relationships. Other participants saw even basic performances as impossible in the absence of a partnership. Interestingly, para-equestrian rider, Grace, saw her limited ability to physically overpower horses as a competitive advantage because it meant performances could only be achieved through partnership:

> I think what most of our riders do, talking about para-equestrian, is that we do always see them [the horse] as a partner and we can never ever work against them, because we cannot use any force, if I use force I am sitting beside the

> saddle usually so that might be, at some point people might think that is a disadvantage but sometimes I think when I look at some other riders it might be an advantage (P135).

Similar conceptions about physical strength, the partnership, and performance outcomes were outlined by female participants, with Claire suggesting male riders could circumnavigate the partnership by substituting force for goodwill. A number of participants also highlighted the importance of the partnership to competitive success, but saw themselves as unique in this, noting the range of philosophies that drive different elite riders. Georgina and Hannah were curious about the views of these 'other' riders, with Georgina alluding to one very well-known elite rider "who's got so many horses I don't know how he knows what he's sitting on" (P134). Participants also differentiated between good riders, who were able to establish strong relationships with horses, and gifted riders, who may be able to perform on their physical ability or simply establish immediate connections with horses. Lucy described the latter of these two alternatives, stating, "It's only exceptional riders that can get on horses and get a partnership and that's because they're not too hard on the horse and they just work with them, feel their way round them" (P130).

Rather than suggesting that "exceptional riders" dominate horses into submission, Lucy argues that a tentative approach coupled with high levels of ability may facilitate the establishment of an immediate partnership. Georgina saw the partnership as "huge" (P134) in relation to sporting performance, but was cognizant of the repeat catch-ride successes of other international riders, noting:

> A relationship with those genius riders is probably less necessary, or it forms instantly…because everything works so perfectly for those good riders you tend to think they're all automatons underneath but I don't think they are, they happen to be beautifully trained, which makes them look as if they're not existing on a relationship. Whereas those of us who are less skilled riders are more needing that relationship, that's how I look at it (P134).

Interestingly, although Georgina considered herself less skilled than some other elite riders, her formidable riding history suggested otherwise, with her comments here reflecting the different ways in which the most successful elite riders may navigate equestrian sport. The partnership could also influence a rider's ability to sustain a

successful long-term sporting career. Given that large amounts of time and money may be invested in sporting outcomes, particularly at the elite level, a strong horse-rider relationship may provide a measure of security in an otherwise uncertain and psychologically challenging competitive climate. Knowing one's horse well may also facilitate a competitive focus. As an example of this, Beth described experiencing a harmonious and connected relationship with her horse that allowed her to feel in control, confident, and clear about what lay ahead of her during her Olympic medal winning performance:

> I was never nervous like, I knew from the moment that I stepped onto my horse that we were gonna jump a clean round…there was no focus on placing or results …I only allowed myself to think in terms of…what things I could control…that's the biggest mistake I see, people thinking "Oh this point, or if I make a mistake it's this many points or if I jump clean I have this many points and I'll be in this place or that place" and that is not part of, that has nothing to do with the partnership or the performance, it's...irrelevant really…when you focus on the things you can control, and the horse and the turns and the, this and that and those things that are within your control, then the other part takes care of itself (P136).

Having a deep bond and well-developed knowledge of her horse Botany allowed Beth to include his actions, as well as her own, within the framework of things she could control, facilitating a confident, successful performance. As Kathy suggested, in partnership one has a better "understanding of what makes them tick" (P115) and this was an advantage in the competition arena. Indeed, Thompson and Nesci (2013) found that equestrian athletes commonly manage the unpredictability and dangerousness of equestrian sport by developing relationships with horses in which familiarity with the horse serves as a form of risk protection. Given the many variables that affect the sporting outcomes of equestrian dyads, choosing to focus on the relationship between horse and rider could also serve a protective function when performances did not go well and this helped to build a resilient approach to sport.

Choosing to judge one's performances according to personal, subjective prerogatives may be one way of guarding against the disappointments and uncertainty of sporting outcomes. Although she had been a highly successful, competitive elite rider, Natalie's ethos toward equestrian sport centred on training rather than performance success

and this helped her to prioritise horse welfare and the partnership over success, though she suggested that such priorities led to success in many instances:

> For me it was always about the training, the competition is just the proof of the training…And if it happens that you happen to win, well and good, but you're not out there to beat this one and that one, you're not out there to win at all costs…with horses, there's always going to be ups and downs and there's always going to be disappointments and there's always going to be a horse going lame and whatever but if your mentality is "It's all about the partnership, it's all about the training" …you can go out and compete and not have any other competitors, it doesn't matter, what matters is umm trying to do your personal best (P123).

In some cases, a partnership facilitated success because as well as encouraging willing, unified performances, it enabled dyads to compensate for a lack of ability or talent on the part of the horse or the rider, as Tegan indicated with respect to Sage:

> The competitor in me would like…certain things in her physically…but I cannot ask for more as far as our, our partnership and relationship, I mean we have, that is nailed and umm it's interesting because that is probably the thing that has made us so competitive, where I can go in the ring against very big, fancy flashy expensive horses and Sage's not that big, she's not, she's quite fancy and brilliant but she's not as...as they are, but because we have that sort of harmony thing going for us, we're very....like we look like one unified piece and we're very accurate in the way we compete and that's how I can beat those big horses and umm and so I would say you know that if I was just riding her and we didn't have that, I probably wouldn't be doing as well on a horse like her (P142).

In the same vein, Ellen saw the bond between horse and rider as critical to performance success, noting how both her Grand Prix horses "far exceeded their...talent, because the relationship was there" (P141), while Georgina described the success of one of her eventing horses as the product of his "heart" rather than his "ability" (P136) describing how she fell "deeply in love with that sort of heart" (P136). The horse-rider relationship could also make a better rider, as Val described:

> I wouldn't be able to ride as well as I can now if I didn't have Moss. He has made me what I am, 'cos I've ridden lots and lots of different horses but nowhere near, made nowhere near the progress on all those horses that I've made in the short term with Moss (P107).

The sum of horse and rider together may equal more than the sum of either individual. Referring to several well-known elite riders who shared close relationships with their current mounts, Tegan described how certain horse-rider combinations possessed a connection that made them highly competitive, suggesting that horse-rider compatibility may in fact play a role in the partnership and in sporting success. Where this connection was missing, she noted, "It doesn't matter how much that horse cost or how nice that horse was, they're never gonna get there" (P142). Abbey also suggested that a horse may be brilliant, but with a different rider the horse may not be so successful and vice versa, and thus achieving a partnership could impact on performance outcomes and the fulfilment of one's athletic potential.

The link between sporting success and the horse-rider relationship was not always direct in nature, with a number of factors influencing sporting success. Participants were often careful to contextualise the horse-rider relationship as just one of a number of ingredients essential to achieving success in equestrian sport. A partnership could influence performance outcomes, but it did not guarantee success or serve to eliminate other factors that also impact performance, with other dynamics sometimes as or more predictive of success than a strong relationship. When all other factors are held constant, the relationship between horse and rider may be pivotal, but as a number of participants noted, a wide range of factors influence performance outcomes, including the talent and physical aptitude of horse and rider, environmental factors such as course conditions, sporting politics, and discrepancies in judging. In context to this, Grace noted, "I don't know if judges always see it [the partnership], that might depend on the judge…" (P135). Environmental and social factors outside of the horse-rider relationship could also influence performances, with Hayley noting how past injuries, difficult weather conditions, and a troubled relationship between herself and her lunger had contributed to several recent less than ideal performances.

Claudia believed that a strong partnership could improve performance, but saw strong sporting performances as possible without a partnership, while Kate noted, "It's never gonna work no matter how good the relationship is…if they're a big striding horse

and especially in para [-equestrian], if the rider, para rider can't sit to that kind of movement" (P141), though other participants suggested a connection between horse and rider could compensate for physical incompatibility. Although Diana believed relationships with horses were central to sporting success, she was quick to highlight "other things" that affected performance outcomes in elite dressage, particularly "politics in dressage" (P126). Participants also emphasized the challenges of equestrian sport, even where a strong horse-rider relationship existed, suggesting that a partnership between horse and rider and talent did not guarantee sporting success. Elizabeth experienced a strong relationship with her current competition horse and together they had achieved high levels of success, but this did prevent them from making two mistakes during a dressage test just prior to our interview. Other participants separated the relationship between horse and rider from the true "work" of equestrian sport, as illustrated here by Claudia:

> I think...I think if you have a really good partnership with your horse, it can like, help your performance in the competition but I also think, even if you don't, you can still have a really good performance if you don't have the partnership but if the horse does its job and you do your job (P140).

To Claudia, the partnership mattered, but it was only one of a number of factors that affected performance, especially given the physicality of vaulting and the need to work flexibly with different horses:

> A really good vaulter should, can be able to like...just, get on a horse and just, be able to adapt to their movement, work together quite quickly and do routines 'cos you can go round and borrow different horses (P140).

Interestingly, Lara saw a partnership as critical for other sports, but was ambivalent about its influence on her own sport of endurance:

> A lot of times in the sport like I said I just get on a horse and go and try and build a rel[ationship], like a relationship and in a way a partnership, those can't be built in one day, they can't, so it's more like building an understanding umm so my sport doesn't have that. But you do see success in the way of…[rider's name] on her horse [name]…she's been riding that horse for a while so she has success in the way of, she knows her horse so well, she knows how fast she needs to go so (pause) yes, yes and no for my sport, cos I've seen people do

> really well on a horse they've never ridden before and that's probably the really good work of the owner, whoever conditions the horses (P132).

Rather than endorsing the quick establishment of a partnership, Lara saw herself and other endurance riders as able to operate competitively in the absence of a true partnership, emphasizing the physical training over an interpersonal connection between horse and rider; however, potential existed for the partnership to heighten or enhance competitiveness. Similarly, although Claudia believed vaulting performances could occur in the absence of a strong relationship, she was wistful about the pleasure of owning a horse and being able to spend time with it, noting how getting to know a horse enhanced her capacity to predict the animal's behaviour. Ethan too felt that in some instances, talented horses will perform well regardless of who is riding them, describing these horses as "triers," however, he believed that less talented horses may also be successful by virtue of "incredible partnerships with their riders," that "works because they know them so well and they're advantaged by having such a good partnership/relationship with that horse" (P113). A strong horse-rider relationship may also be seen as a buffer when faced with the pressures of performing to an audience, as Jane describes:

> If you've got that confidence and something does go wrong in the test, the wheels don't fall off, whereas if you're not 100% umm in that relationship with each other and something goes wrong then immediately you're at each other (P107).

Participants also believed that in some instances sporting performances could be elicited through force rather than partnership. Natalie states, "It can be [a partnership] or it can be a dominating... with a lot of boys like well, fifteen-year-old girls too, it's a domination thing" (P123). Natalie also emphasized the importance of achieving performances through a horse's willingness, suggesting that performances may be elicited "dishonestly" (P107):

> I often say to kids, "The horse has to do it because it wants to do it for you, not because it's scared of what's going to happen if it doesn't do it." That's always been my way, I mean, that's not everybody's way, and certainly when you short-cut and you want results umm before the basics are really...before the basics are really instilled in the horse then the only way you can get them over

> the fence is just bashing them around and to me, if you have to bash your horse around a course, it shouldn't be there, you know, some horses like to do it, and they want to do it for you, other horses really don't have the talent for it, don't have the ability for it, or are frightened, and if you bash them over a fence, it's not fair (P123).

Natalie raises an important ethical point about equestrian sport that should not be overlooked: the potential to abuse a horse's willingness. Horses may be large, powerful animals, but as participant narratives implied, they are also vulnerable to domination, and their sensitivity to fear as a preyed upon species provides an avenue for equestrians to compromise the integrity of their relationships with horses by eliciting performances in the absence of trust, confidence, respect, or other virtues central to the harmonious sporting dyad. As Natalie suggested, partnerships were not the only way to achieve sporting goals or the only way to interact with horses, even if they may be the ideal means through which sporting goals are achieved. While Melissa believed the partnership was critical to sporting performance, she had observed other ways of operating as an elite rider:

> I know there's certainly a lot of people out there... say, [rider's name], successful, and they run a million horses…the place is crazy. He's very successful but he goes through a lotta horses, and he goes through them like a factory and umm I don't want to be like that (P109).

Producing large numbers of horses through mercenary means may work in the short-term, but was not typically conceived as sustainable across a lengthy career with horses. As Elisa stated, "Some people think you can force a horse, and maybe you can for a short while, but not for a long period" (P146). Georgina regarded her own performance successes as a product of the partnerships she was able to build with horses, but she was equivocal about the influence of the horse-rider relationship on sporting success generally, noting how "domination works to a degree" (P136), though she believed domination was a less broadly functional approach to achieving success. Beth expressed similar sentiments:

> I do think a strong willed rider can, can dominate and and exude a performance out of an animal that maybe doesn't have the best partnership yet or is developing or is not a partnership…a strong-willed rider can get that out (P136).

Participants sometimes referred to "other" riders successfully catch-riding or "exuding" performances out of horses, but for them, a partnership was essential to success. Yet a number of participants were competing at the highest level of their sport on horses with whom they were not yet well acquainted or with whom they did not share a strong relationship, while Ellen even described her most memorable sporting performance as winning a freestyle dressage competition with a "draw mare" she had ridden only ten times prior to competition, noting "we just clicked …it was spectacular" (P141). While Ellen's experience appeared an exception to the rule, other participants, such as Crystal, were working successfully with horses with whom they had only recently become acquainted and some were currently competing horses with whom they were not working well. Emma described her relationship with her current competition horse as "miles apart" (P128) from what she considered an ideal partnership, while Ellen expressed similar sentiments about her current international horse. Such less-than-ideal partnerships may have curtailed the performance potential of the dyads in question, but it had not stopped them from competing at the highest levels of equestrian sport, a finding suggestive of the complexity of the relationship between dyadic harmony and performance success.

The capacity to form relationships with horses quickly, despite the emphasis participants placed on building relationships over time, may serve an important protective function for elite equestrian athletes, for whom being consistently successful is often critical to ensuring a livelihood. When Grace's horse unexpectedly injured a ligament, she was able to pick up a different horse and win a European selection trial for a major international competition only five weeks after first riding the horse, with the pair continuing on to compete internationally in their field, though as Grace noted, their relationship was still developing. The partnership between horse and rider was commonly understood as an evolving entity, leading to a non-linear connection between the partnership and sporting success. Georgina, for instance, described a difficult relationship with Morris, a "very very tricky" (P134) horse with whom she had experienced the highest levels of success. Despite their success, the interpersonal difficulties between the pair did not abate over time. Moreover, in contrast to the emphasis she placed on trust and partnership, Georgina described a challenging relationship with a horse that "used to hit everything, I nearly fell off, he just kept getting up the grades but he was a liability I thought" (P134). She noted, "I just never really knew what made that horse tick" (P134), but this did not prevent the pair from competing and winning at the highest level of their sport.

While a partnership was often espoused as essential to sporting success, or at least one of a number of factors that may influence performance outcomes, participants also engaged with the notion that a personal attachment between horse and rider could be an impediment to success. The most compelling example of this came from endurance rider, Hannah, whose main competition horse meant a great deal to her. This for Hannah was a competitive disadvantage when competing against riders who did not value the lives of their horse(s). A strong relationship meant that "competitively, well definitely you understand your horse better" (P125), but this did not necessarily offset the benefits of a more mercenary approach to horses in endurance racing:

> There's a lot of people that don't really care what happens to the horse. I mean, I care that my horse doesn't (pause) die afterwards, you know? Because of that, I'll ride competitive, but to a point, I'll umm, never push him too much over his limit where like, some of these people umm (pause) they, they literally ride the horse till he drops. They've got too much money, too much [many] horses, I mean, how do you compete against someone like that who doesn't put the horse first? I'll never be able to compete against them because I'm not willing to do that. I actually want to take my horse home afterwards (P125).

From Hannah's perspective, endurance riders who view the horse as a disposable commodity possess a distinct competitive advantage. Hannah had refused large offers of money for Chance, and had withdrawn from a recent race after sensing something was not right with him, to the chagrin of her fellow competitors. She had also decided to allow Chance to be administered intravenous fluids at a competition even though this precluded them from competing at a major, upcoming competition, all decisions which had limited their competitiveness. As our interview continued, it became increasingly evident that the bond between horse and rider had left Hannah questioning how to continue as a competitive rider when her chances of succeeding were reduced because of a strong horse-rider relationship. With some distress, Hannah described the relationships she observed between other endurance competitors and their horses:

> I mean take the [group of riders]… they've got a partnership because they need the horse, but there's no relationship, they don't know the horses, they don't train the horses, they only see the horse the first time at the competition, ride

> the horse till he drops, ride till he finishes, get off, go on. I mean that's not a relationship (P125).

Although Hannah held significant concerns about her sport, she was also a highly competitive and motivated rider, trying to navigate a sport in which emotional detachment appeared to pay greater competitive dividends than forming strong attachments. Participants from other sporting disciplines also endorsed the possibility of competing successfully in the absence of a personal horse-rider relationship, though typically having a personal relationship was not seen as a disadvantage, even if it was not necessarily always an advantage. Early in her career, one of Natalie's horses had broken down after running hard across multiple cross-country courses, an experience that changed how Natalie behaved toward subsequent horses in her career. Yet like Hannah, she had experienced a backlash as a result of her ethos toward horses and horse-rider interaction:

> I wouldn't go fast if I didn't feel the ground was right or I'd just do the dressage and showjumping and not run the cross-country and I used [to], frustrate the hell outta [name] (laughs) because in those days you had to go fast at every bunfight otherwise you just weren't a bloke, you know, you weren't good enough, you couldn't make a team because you just weren't tough enough (P123).

Natalie's decisions, it seemed, were interpreted by her teammates as compromising the performance-oriented masculinity of the sport, as well as jeopardising the success of any sporting teams of which she was a member and in fact, as she noted, her chances of making sporting teams had been minimised because of her decision to prioritise horse welfare over performance outcomes. Melissa also described supressing her emotions to preserve a performance- rather than emotion-focused sporting identity that adhered to gendered expectations of elite athletes:

> …you tend to in those team situations, you don't cry, you don't, you can't. You can't be a female, you've gotta be a boy, "tough" and umm just play that kinda game (P109).

It may be that gendered notions of equestrian sport impact the judgments and behaviour of elite riders, particularly in instances where female riders are expected to prove their care and affection for horses will not make them any less competitive. Other

participants had also felt pressure to prioritise performance success above all else, though their understandings of this did not necessarily refer to gendered constructions of sport. The autobiographies of Fox-Pitt (2009), King (1998) and Funnell (2005) speak to the pressure riders may experience in juggling the horse-rider relationship, horse welfare, the expectations of owners, team managers, and team-mates, and the desire to be competitive and make a living from equestrian sport.

Accounts of the relationship between horse and rider impinging negatively upon sporting success tended to contain an important link to the ethical treatment of horses in sport. Participants cited a desire to protect and care for their horses, as well as preserve their personal relationships with them, as central to why they were sometimes less competitive than other equestrians. Juggling these priorities amidst an uneven playing field represented a significant challenge, as Hannah indicated more than once during our interview, stating, "You sort of already have a disadvantage when you compete against these guys" (P125). The links between horse welfare, competitiveness, and the horse-rider relationship are important to consider given the centrality of horse welfare to the future of equestrian sport. While some participants did not draw a direct link between performance outcomes and the relationship they held with their horse(s), a certain tension was nonetheless evident between what was sometimes required in elite competition and the value participants placed on their horses. In addition to the experiences of Hannah and Natalie, other participants described being criticized for refusing to do things such as showjump a tired horse, even when, in Georgina's case, her decision not to compete did not affect her country's rankings or chances of winning a medal. Empathy towards horses was always the right decision as far as Natalie was concerned, but she was aware of the potential drawbacks from a competitive point-of-view:

> The only downside to a partnership which to me isn't a downside but maybe to somebody…that has a win-at-all-costs mentality, perhaps you know if you ride a horse like it is, like it is a winning machine, like it is just a, you know, a chattel, then maybe you can have the disregard that you need to beat a horse over a fence when it's not right...that's not me, you know, so maybe...if push comes to shove, in a situation like, I'm, I'm tough as anything and I'm tough as anything on myself, but there's no way that I would make an animal do something that it would, that it would critically hurt it to do (P123).

Diana, too, expressed ambivalence about the influence of a strong partnership on performance in dressage, a perspective that reflects the concerns of Heuschmann (2011) who writes that a revolution is needed in order to reintegrate horsemanship and by default, a sentient value for the horse into equestrian sport, noting that "too often, the [dressage] rider with the good, supple seat and the rhythmical and relaxed horse isn't in the ribbons" (p. 48). As the preceding narrative suggests, the influence of the partnership on sporting performance may vary according to sporting discipline. For instance, Lara, reflected on the moment-by-moment synchronicity required of dressage dyads, noting, "They have to be so attuned to each other throughout the whole competition…they need to be with each other at every single step" (P132). In a similar vein, Coffin (1978) speaks of dressage as the outcome of horse and rider "moving as a unit, in one balance" (p. 120). Lara was ambivalent about the form of partnership required in her own sport of endurance, however, describing how she commonly competed horses with whom she had not worked before, suggesting that the partnership may be of less consequence for endurance dyads than in other sports. She also attributed endurance performances to being able to ride well, however, understanding, sharing goals, and willingness on the part of the horse were also conceived as important, suggesting that some form of partnership may be important for endurance sports. A former elite level, internationally successful eventer and current amateur showjumper, Lucy saw a partnership as critical for three-day eventing but less central in showjumping:

> For me as an eventer, I have to have, I feel like I need to have probably, compared with my current showjumping experience…a deeper more meaningful, longer term relationship because there's just a lot more stuff going down and I don't know that that's the same for all eventing riders you know, cos a lot of them can hop on and go, but for me personally, I need to have a really good relationship with my horse and I can communicate at various different levels with it (P130).

In a similar vein, eventing rider, Pippa Funnell (2005) compares the "business" of being an eventing rider with that of being an elite showjumper, as is her husband, William Funnell:

> William's business operates differently from mine. I am reliant on owners keeping horses with me and, as I am completely driven to get to the top, my

> interest is in building up the partnerships. Buying and selling has never interested me. William would love to be the same, as he has the same ambitions, but showjumping is a completely different world from eventing. There's so much more prize money and therefore the value of the horses is greater, so he can't justify keeping many of the promising young horses he buys to produce. There's a permanent cycle of change in his yard – which is why he – and many other British show jumpers – has not always enjoyed the success at top level that he deserves. In contrast, I had a collection of promising youngsters that I envisaged keeping for their whole careers (p. 87).

At another point in the book, she also describes her husband's pragmatic reaction to the sudden loss of their two dogs, noting, "…he has always been able to be more pragmatic; a showjumper's life has to be more commercial than an eventer's….he is used to horses coming and going" (Funnell, 2005, p. 201). Renowned eventing rider, Fox-Pitt (2009) also describes how it can take around six years to produce "a top competition horse" (p. 234), suggesting horse and rider may work together for a considerable period of time in eventing before reaching elite levels, while Kelly made a similar comment with respect to Grand Prix dressage dyads. This supports the findings of Wipper (2000) in which a partnership between horse and rider was seen as fundamental to one's engagement in eventing, while Coulter (2013) suggests that the culture of elite showjumping aligns best with "a particular way of being which is more compatible with the ways in which men are socialised to think and act" (p. 180). The discipline-specific importance of horse-rider partnerships is also addressed by Gilbert and Gillett (2013) in their research on polo players, in which participants indicated how the relationship between horse and rider may be more or less important depending on the demands of the sport concerned. Moreover, Coulter (2013) found that although showjumping is dominated by women, at the highest levels of the sport men represent the majority of competitors. In addition, Coulter (2013) suggests that professional riding requires different qualities from amateur riding and that these qualities appear to be gendered insomuch as men far exceed women in professional ranks of equestrian showjumpers.

In dressage, where the judging of performances is subjective (Knijnik, 2013), whether or not a connection was drawn between the partnership and sporting performance depended largely on participants' beliefs about the accuracy of the judging system, as Diana's narrative suggested. Where a strong partnership was seen as antithetical to the

achievement of sporting success, the way in which dressage is judged was also typically seen as flawed. This mattered not just for participants involved in dressage, but for dressage performances in three-day eventing, with Matthew noting wryly, "You'd like to see the judge appreciate what's happening" (P111). An emphasis on physical appearance in dressage may also create a disjuncture between visual appearance and the actual quality of a dressage performance, something Melissa eluded to, noting how unlike dressage, showjumping was "relatively black and white" (P109):

> Dressage can definitely be covered up, manipulated, pretended to be doing umm umm you know, like Monty, like I pretended my way to tests to Four Star and got okay scores but it was just on the edge of me being a very good showman in the ring and creating something that wasn't really there (P109).

Dressage performances could be elicited in a range of ways, even if a partnership makes for "the best presentation" (P133) in the arena. In less subjective disciplines, a more straightforward dynamic between performance success and the horse-rider relationship was described, as Melissa noted in context to showjumping. Interestingly, harmony, or the appearance of it, was not always viewed as ideal, for as Matthew noted, strong performances in some sporting disciplines may appear disharmonious:

> Going back to cross-country, sometimes it doesn't look harmonious, sometimes if you're getting the time, which you've got to go really fast to do, it looks a bit ugly, a bit wild and a bit rough and not very nice but sometimes that's what you need to get the job done (P111).

Matthew made a similar comment with respect to showjumping, "Sometimes you do something ugly to leave the fence up, but you leave the fence up, that's more important than how good it looked" (P111). Harmony was a fluid concept and its implications for the horse-rider partnership differed across sports. Finally, the partnership appeared particularly valuable to para-equestrian participants, who noted their inability to achieve performances via other means, while vaulting participants were more ambivalent, but emphasized the importance of trust between horse, vaulter, and lunger, highlighting the unique relational dimensions of vaulting sports.

Critical to this discussion of sporting performances and horse-rider relationships in sport is a sense of what is considered a successful performance. For a number of participants, performance success was defined in accordance with the achievement of

conventional markers of success, such as a high placing or mark, and/or winning a competition, however, a number of participants also defined success or performance outcomes in subjective terms. Indeed, it was not uncommon for participants to define sporting success without reference to competition outcomes, and according to their own personal experience of a performance. The most significant performance of a participant's career was in some instances representative of a personal, rather than a sporting triumph, with Hannah highlighting the importance of completing an endurance race at the same competition where her horse had almost died one year earlier. Other subjectively defined performances occurred when a dyad achieved their highest score to date, or completed a competition without making a mistake that had been made previously. Funnell (2005, p. 241) writes "…results are only relevant to the horse you're riding," while Melissa's understanding of sporting success incorporated a similarly subjective view of success:

> Successful doesn't mean (pause) winning, you know what I mean? Successful means, you know, going out and scoring a percent better again in that test and you know that horse did the test before and didn't grind his teeth, it's a huge win on that horse, he went in there and his transitions down from walk he didn't pigroot because he's too high behind, he didn't do it this time and just little things like that, I go, "Yep that was better, that was better" and that for me is successful for that horse (P109).

Performing well for some participants meant performing confidently and/or well in adverse circumstances and in such instances, the partnership may be critical. Both Hayley and Patrick described their best vaulting performances as occurring when they were able to move expressively and confidently in the arena because of trust in the horse and lunger. A memorable performance could also result from seeing a development in the partnership between horse and rider, even if this was not accompanied by competitive success. Kate described a frightening experience in the competition arena when Max began to panic, yet despite the stressful nature of this experience, Kate reflected on it positively as she had sensed Max trying to remain calm and communicate with her despite his distress:

> He was trying so hard not to do the full-on blind bolt but I could feel, like where he would normally switch off completely and just *go*, I could feel that sense of "Oh God Mum, oh shit I'm scared, what am I supposed to be doing, I'm really scared, I want out of here but what do you want me to do?"

> like…you could really feel him trying to work that out and that's really special. I think to have got to that stage, even with how fearful he still gets, to at least get to that stage is a huge leap for that horse (P141).

While Kate described this performance as "horrible performance-wise," it was one of their biggest [rides] "relationship-wise," as horse and rider managed to connect despite the horse's fear. To Kate, the performance encapsulated "how much faith he [Max] was putting in me and that relationship" (P141) and while this moment of connection did not lead to a positive competition result, it was nonetheless a meaningful achievement. A subjective understanding of sporting success meant that even an Olympic gold medal could be experienced as less than a perfect or satisfactory performance, evidenced in the hesitation in Kathy's voice when she described her Olympic gold medal winning performance as "ideal…I suppose…" with reference to having had "the odd mistake" (P115) during the performance. Similarly, Melissa recalled the lack of emotion she experienced at having won an Olympic medal:

> At the time standing up there getting that silver medal I was going, "Where's that feeling?" going, "It's not here." I'm going, "What's going on?" You smile, you smile cos there's lots [of] cameras, you smile and you're going, "Why aren't I feeling it, why aren't I feeling the love?" you know and it was just, because I'd made mistakes and it ate at me, it really did. Not to the point where I was going to give up and I was crying but umm maybe if I had've cried about it, it would've been better (P109).

As Melissa's account reflects, extrinsic success may not always be experienced as anticipated. Claire also recalled a successful competition result as unreflective of the true nature of the experience due to the pressure faced from team officials to change her horse's performance style:

> Your hierarchies want to make everything better, but I got to the Olympics on that horse the way he was….but they wanted to make it all better and bigger and better and yeah, it was too much, shouldn't have happened and then the horse started to go downhill from there and I started to lose confidence in them so you know, that was my worst, I mean I still got third or fourth and [country] still won the [competition name] so I mean, the placing actually doesn't show the whole disappointment of it, but yeah (P120).

Extrinsic sporting achievements were not always accompanied by intrinsic satisfaction in one's performances, nor do they always represent something meaningful to the rider. Jim, for instance, described a particularly sensational performance that he did not "identify with, but it sure amuses other people" (P111). In an equally nuanced fashion, Lara described one of her best performances as one in which she worked as a team with other riders from her country. They finished last in the competition but brought their horses home "safely" (P132), worked well together, and enjoyed the ride. Moreover, during the ride Lara recognised "a mental switch" (P132) in her horse that made her realise the competitive heights still ahead of them but within their reach, an exciting personal outcome, while Abbey's best performance was outlined without reference to the actual outcome, but in context to how the performance was experienced, "completely concentrated and ahh completely umm harmonious" (P127). A rider may experience synergy with a horse, where the horse jumps clear and is "mentally really good" (P111) but such performances do not necessarily always translate into competitive success, thus whether the performance is experienced as successful or not in such circumstances, depends in part on the rider's goals and values. In reflection of this, Georgina was emphatic about her satisfaction with an Olympic performance that did not meet expectations:

> Everybody said, "Gosh I'm so sorry," and I said, "I'm not, he was absolutely amazing, he did the best possible three phases he could do at the one time in our lives when we really needed to do that and five other people did it better" (P134).

Georgina's matter-of-fact account reflects the resilience participants regarded as central to enduring success, while also reflecting her emphasis on judging performances according to the strength of the partnership. It was not her Olympic medal winning performance that Lucy described as the most moving or ideal performance of her career, but instead another competition at which she experienced the "most perfect, perfect ride cross-country" (P130):

> It was just like, so in sync, it was so perfect, just everything happened right and I came in right on time on the clock and it was just...perfect. Umm smooth and rhythm, and just communication and (pause) such a buzz (P130).

What occurs during positive sporting performances may be difficult to describe, with Jim referring to such performances as "a beautiful, beautiful synergy between psychology and physiology" (P111). In some circumstances a powerfully experienced physical and psychological performance collided with the achievement of extrinsic success, culminating in an experience that was both personally and professionally rewarding, as Elisa described in relation to her gold medal winning dressage performance:

> It was like, in a flow, everything just….ahh the both, the Special and the Kur, those both competitions in [city name] with him, that was like, you know, it was easy and it didn't take any effort and we were one team. I didn't even know there were people around, it was just him and me…you know, the feeling, it's ahh once in a while you get a feeling and you think, "Ahh that was my best test," but with him ahh you know it ahh all fell together, it was the two best tests and ahh Olympic medal and the whole atmosphere with it (P146).

Succeeding under pressure and experiencing an emotionally engaging synchrony between oneself and one's horse may result in a sublime performance that reflects the flow state outlined by Csikszentmihalyi (1975/2000) and discussed in Chapter Six. Mechanically correct and superlative performances may be differentiated from each other, with a partnership typically accompanying the latter, but not necessarily the former, as Amy describes here:

> If you don't have a relationship...I mean you can go in and do the movements but… I don't really know that it can meld into something that's beautiful where you're both flowing together. …somebody can go out there and ride a technically correct performance and that's not the same (P143).

These findings suggest that competitive success may be measured via extrinsic or intrinsic factors and may be considered in either static or dynamic terms, with constructions of success influencing how, or if, participants connected the partnership with performance outcomes. Understanding what is considered successful is clearly relevant to forming an understanding of how and why the horse-rider relationship affects sporting outcomes, and also provides an insight into the orientation of equestrian athletes to their sporting activities. It must be noted, however, that although participants often described sporting performances subjectively, when asked to consider the link between the horse-rider relationship and sporting performance, it was evident that "success" was typically

conceived in conventional terms, particularly when comparing the competitive orientation of different equestrian athletes.

9.2.1 Code: Investing Emotionally: Managing (De)attachment to Horses

Forming emotional attachments to competition horses engendered strong sporting performances in a multiplicity of ways, and in many cases, participants reported experiencing deep emotional bonds with their competition horses, particularly after working together for a significant period of time. Emotional attachment was not uniformly positive with respect to being a competitive athlete, however, with participants describing emotional detachment as a protective mechanism that sometimes served to mitigate the stress and risks of elite sporting participation. Following his first advanced competition win since retiring, Mark Todd (2012, p. 186) described having to wait while the course was "held" due to the death of another rider on-course:

> Eventually, the competition was restarted…and I won my section…That must sound extraordinarily hard nosed to people outside the sport, but it doesn't mean that none of us care what happened. It's just that riders develop a way of dissociating themselves from such an incident, or else none of us would be able to carry on.

Distancing from the risks of equestrian sport with respect to the horse's mortality was also sometimes necessary, yet even highly successful elite athletes struggled with this. Pippa Funnell (2005) writes of being "shattered" (p. 64) at the loss of one of her young horses, describing how, "like all my horses, I'd got attached to him" (p. 64), while Todd (2012, p. 81) describes the "anguish" he felt when his horse, Face the Music, broke his leg during a cross-country round:

> I realised instantly, in a horrible moment, that the poor horse had broken his leg above the knee; he was standing there, so quietly, with the bone sticking out and the leg swinging, a ghastly sight that will stay with me for ever. The vet took 20 minutes to come and put him down, and it was the longest 20 minutes of my life. I was in bits, trying to comfort him and saying over and over to him how sorry I was. In the end, a friend came and drove me back to the stables before the horse was shot.

Participants described needing to be competitive with multiple horses, meaning that their emotional energies needed to be distributed accordingly. They also sometimes second guessed their own emotional investments in horses because of concerns around the instability of third-party ownership arrangements, as was the case for Ethan. A number of participants were reliant on owners to purchase horses of the calibre they required to be competitive and in some cases this had emotional consequences for the intimacy of the horse-rider relationship. Para-dressage rider, Ellen made this clear when describing her current mount:

> The horse that I'm riding here umm I don't have him, I have to drive five hours to ride him, so I ride him several times a month, umm he's...he's, he belongs to a friend of mine who competes in the Grand Prix, she's planning to do the Pan Am Games selection trials with him next year, and she's very graciously lent him to me but in no way is he mine (P139).

While failing to form a healthy relationship could be an impediment to performance success and enjoyment of equestrian sport, in some instances; riders may be advantaged by not having formed a close bond because of the emotional risks associated with a sudden change to the rider-owner agreement. On the verge of losing the ride on two elite horses within a short space of time, Pippa Funnell (2005) writes: "This was the first time I had to face up to selling a horse when I desperately didn't want to. Of course, others had been sold before, but those sales had been the results of pragmatic joint decisions by myself and the owner that they weren't going to do the job" (p. 141). Following the success of gold medal winning dressage horse, Valegro, every performance success ironically increased the risk of Dujardin losing the ride on Valegro, creating an invidious performance environment for the famous dressage dyad (Majendie, 2014). Although Funnell and other elite riders (cf. Todd, 1998, 2012, Fox-Pitt, 2009) expressed an understanding of the financial perspective of elite horse owners and were greatly appreciative of the support they received from owners, the loss of a horse could be both personally and professionally devastating, and with repeated losses, a certain measure of emotional self-preservation may emerge as a suitable coping strategy.

That emotionally distancing oneself from horses could facilitate a competitive approach to equestrian sport was evidenced in the practice some participants alluded to of deliberating not naming or nick-naming their horses. This was particularly the case where participants anticipated a transient horse-rider relationship, as Jane notes:

> If you have a horse where you think "Yeah it's a turn-over horse" quite often I don't...I mean I don't know, all my horses have names and nicknames, I'll have a horse that I'll have him training or to sell and I'll just call it the brown horse, so you don't have that investment in the emotional side of it, and you ride those horses quite clinically I guess, it's all about producing a product quickly (P107).

Naming horses may play a critical role in determining the emotional limits of the horse-rider relationship, with boundaries around certain horse-rider relationships facilitative of a competitive, business-minded approach to sport. The act of naming, Strauss (1997) writes, directly affects the extent to which a sense of knowing exists between individuals, and in naming an animal or object, a sense of how to act and what to expect from that which has been named is indicated. Furthermore, as Sanders (2003) notes, implicit in the act of naming is the attribution of individuality and identity, while non-naming practices tend to facilitate emotional distance, hence their common use in animal shelters where animals may be euthanized (Arluke, 1994). In the current study, individualising horses through naming practices appeared to foster an emotionally connected relationship and helped participants to construct a biographical understanding of individual horses. Yet connecting emotionally with performance horses carried certain risks akin to the emotional experiences of scientists working with laboratory animals in Phillips (1994) research, in which the practice of non-naming allowed participants to consider laboratory animals as a form of scientific equipment, separate and distinct from pet animals.

Phillips (1994) described the decision not to name laboratory animals as "an act of resistance to the social construction of individuality" (p. 129), enabling the laboratory scientist to construct a reality that minimizes the existential threat to the imagined self that might arise out of dissonance caused by engaging toward animals in ways that may cause them pain, harm, even death. Likewise, equestrian athletes must manage their feelings about endangering horses through sporting pursuits, particularly in sports such as endurance or eventing, though for participants in this study, this was achieved through a number of means, including minimising safety threats and conceiving horses as agents, not just non-naming practices.

Non-naming practices were most commonly directed toward horses that riders knew they would only train or compete for a short period; in longer term relationships

maintaining an emotional distance was neither possible nor desirable, as many participants noted. Indeed, while there may be some competitive benefits to emotional detachment and participants sometimes felt they would be more competitive if they were able to maintain an emotional distance from horses, they also expressed a desire to remain emotionally connected to horse(s) and sporting activities. Naming, nick-naming, and personalising horses in intricate ways were common attributes of participants' dialogues about horses. These findings suggest that managing emotions in an equestrian sporting context is a particularly complex activity, with both attachment and detachment potentially facilitative of sporting success.

9.3 Discussion of Findings

In many instances, the relationship between horse and rider was experienced as a vital part of performance success, in keeping with Pretty and Bridgeman (2005) and Visser et al., (2008); however, participants expressed ambiguous and sometimes contradictory views about this. Technical skills, physical strength, and contextual factors such as sporting discipline may in some instances outweigh the importance of a partnership, with some elite performances viewed as a product of talent and ability rather than a bond between partners, and some performances achieved in the absence of a partnership. Participants who placed value on the relationship between horse and rider conceived it as a form of competitive currency, even a way of compensating for other abilities, such as technical skills. In referring to deep attachment between horse and rider as a potential competitive disadvantage, participants brought into question the status of horses and the horse-rider relationship in modern equestrian sport. Urban myth, popular literature and past scientific research have largely provided support for the notion that a strong, trusting relationship between horse and rider is integral to performance success (cf. McKernan, 2003; Wipper, 2000), while the idea that those horse-rider dyads who possess the closest relationships are the most successful carries intuitive appeal. Yet as Dashper (2014) has suggested, the modern sporting environment places significant pressure on the horse-rider relationship, and a range of factors may affect the success of equestrian dyads.

Although some participants felt strong performances could occur in the absence of a partnership, they nonetheless endorsed the partnership as instrumental in *enhancing* sporting performance. This supports Beauchamp and Whinton's (2005) research on self- and other-efficacy in equestrian sports, whereby confidence in one's horse, a factor likely

associated with a strong horse-rider relationship, was related to rider's self-efficacy beliefs about themselves, with both self- and other-efficacy related to and predictive of enhanced performance. The subjectivity with which participants appraised their own performances also supports Evans and Franklin's (2010) argument that dyadic equestrian performances are experienced via the rhythm of horse-rider action, not simply as a manifestation of training. A number of participants described these harmonious exchanges as a primary motivation for their sporting participation, in keeping with Evans and Franklin (2010), and with Kuhl's (2011) research on human-sled dog dyads.

Given the unpredictability of performances even for the most successful equestrians, investing in the horse-rider relationship and other aspects of the sport outside of competition outcomes may serve as a protective factor, moderating disappointment and distress should sporting failures occur. Participants described how a strong partnership could lead a dyad to exceed their individual ability levels, particularly where a horse lacked ability but the partnership was strong. Research on human sporting teams has suggested a similar pattern with chemistry or teamwork viewed as the catalyst for the success of less talented teams, while exceptionally talented sporting teams sometimes were unable to perform together as a team, despite their innate individual ability levels (Carron et al., 2007).

That the partnership was not the only factor, or even necessarily the most important factor influencing performance outcomes in elite equestrian sport, supports Beauchamp, Jackson, and Lavallee's (2007) contention that skill level, an athlete's physical state, and genetic considerations greatly impact team-based sporting performances. Psychological variables such as personality variables (Beauchamp et al., 2007), self-efficacy beliefs (Moritz, Feltz, Fahrbach, & Mack, 2000) and in dyadic sports, other-efficacy beliefs (Beauchamp & Whinton, 2005; Lent & Lopez, 2002) may also impact on team and dyadic sports, though some of these psychological constructs may directly relate to the partnership between horse and rider. Beauchamp and Whinton's (2005) study of relational efficacy in horse-rider dyads revealed that beliefs about one's own abilities, as well as beliefs about the capabilities of one's horse explained unique variance in riding performance outcomes, with confidence in one's horse predicting a unique amount of variance in performance scores when the effects of self-efficacy beliefs were controlled. Given that the quality of the relationship between horse and rider, as well as the knowledge a rider has of the horse, may affect rider's other-efficacy beliefs, it may be that the relationship between horse and rider plays an important role in mediating the impact of other-efficacy beliefs on sporting

performance for equestrian athletes. In any case, Beauchamp and Whinton's (2005) work together with the findings of the current study suggest that interaction between horse and rider and the beliefs riders hold about their horses and their relationships with them may impact performance outcomes, alongside other factors.

Participants also described how in certain contexts, a strong partnership may be an impediment to performance, or in some circumstances, may not manifest in positive performance outcomes because other factors that influence performance are more influential, such as the perception of judges. Although it was seen as more likely to lead to short-term, rather than long-term success, participants challenged the notion that domination is an entirely unsuccessful way of relating to horses and achieving competitive success (cf. Hearne, 2007; Armstrong Oma, 2010). What an athlete aims to achieve in their interaction with horses may determine the effectiveness of different ways of relating to horses. Where an athlete's career is oriented exclusively around the achievement of performance success, domination-based relationships may be an effective and economical means of participating in equestrian sport. Where participants sought to form meaningful, trusting relationships in which a range of outcomes beyond performance success matter, partnering was viewed as the most economic and effective means of participating in equestrian sport (Hearne, 2007; Armstrong Oma, 2010), even if this meant performance goals took longer to achieve.

Distinctions between the partnership-performance connection were drawn in accordance with sporting discipline. Vaulting participants emphasized the role of technical skills alongside trust in both the horse and lunger, emphasizing the three-way dynamic between vaulter, lunger, and horse, while harmony was considered less relevant to eventing and showjumping than to dressage. An ambivalent image of the partnership-performance connection was drawn by endurance participants. This is in keeping with recent scrutiny of the sport with respect to doping, horse fatalities, and other sporting scandals (Cuckson, 2013) that some have argued create an uneven playing field and bring into question the moral ethics of endurance sports (Goddard, 2014). The most complex connection between the partnership and performance in some respects emerged in context to the sport of dressage. Of the participants who expressed uncertainty around whether or not the partnership between horse and rider facilitated dressage performance, their primary concern reflected what was being rewarded in the competition arena, in keeping with extant research on the subjectivities of dressage judging (Stachurska et al., 2006). These concerns may not be unwarranted, nor are they isolated. As Bryant (2008) notes,

controversy around dressage judging is a perpetual issue and as McLean and McGreevy (2010a) note, while it may serve the public image of equestrian sport to try to ensure that successful competitors appear to also enjoy a harmonious relationship, what is required to actually succeed as an equestrian athlete may not always conform to this image.

Dressage participants described how harsh, forceful training practices appeared to sometimes be rewarded by judges, creating tension between the ethical and relational prerogatives of horse-rider interaction and the need to achieve competitive success. This ambivalence and concern may reflect recent controversy over dressage riding practices such as unnatural gaits (Bryant, 2008), hyperflexion (Rhodin, et al., 2009) and forceful training methods that encourage unnatural movement, that are nonetheless often being rewarded competitively (Heuschmann, 2007; König von Borstel, et al., 2011; Lashley, et al., 2014). Concerns over nationalism, wherein European riders tend to uniformly outscore other countries, and the halo effect, where top riders may receive a strong mark despite an average performance (Bryant, 2008), something Georgina described experiencing because of her profile as a highly successful rider, may have also contributed to participants' diffidence about the partnership-performance dynamic (Bryant, 2008).

Participants were uncertain as to whether judges were accurate or actually even recognised quality performances, partially corroborating research by Stachurska et al., (2006) that found inconsistencies and bias in dressage judging practices. In addition, research by Wolframm, et al., (2011) suggests that judges show certain visual fixation patterns that may explain observed inconsistencies in judging. Wolframm (2010) has argued that the perceptual demands of judging dressage are significant, however, making it difficult to accurately and consistently examine dressage performances, though research by Bridgeman and Pretty (2007) suggests judges are capable of accurately rating horse-rider harmony. Given that dressage is one of the few equestrian disciplines in which harmony between horse and rider is directly examined, these findings bring into question how readily identifiable horse-rider synchronicity is to an outside observer, as well as how dressage may go about measuring such a complex and subjective construct.

Participants discussed performance success in both subjective and objective terms, describing the partnership-performance link in context to objective markers of success, but often defining their own performance successes and failures subjectively. The subjectivity with which participants defined their own successes reflects research findings by Durand-Bush and Salmela (2002) on highly successful elite athletes in which the process, as opposed to the outcome, of sporting activities, was focused upon. It also supports the

findings of a qualitative study on flow states in non-elite older athletes by Jackson et al., (1998) that revealed performance success was subjectively interpreted and defined by participants. For equestrian athletes, achieving a harmonious unity with horses in which mutual focus and even synchrony of physical bodies (Argent, 2012) are experienced may result in a unique type of "peak performance." Participant accounts suggest that both extrinsic success and experiences of oneness and flow between horse and rider may be crucial to sporting motivation, as well as to participants' continued participation in equestrian sport.

Although emotional attachment featured strongly in participant narratives, remaining emotionally distanced from horses in certain circumstances could facilitate a performance-based focus in equestrian sport. Where participants were aware that their interaction with a horse constituted a short-term business-oriented arrangement, remaining emotionally distanced was facilitated through (non)naming practices. This finding supports Myers's (1998) contention that naming inherently creates a sense of the individual, while non-naming may facilitate an instrumental approach to animals. Research by Irvine (2004a) suggests that the act of naming is central to affectionate, human-pet interaction and encourages the emergence of animal identity, while Daspher (2014) points to the link between giving horses "stable name[s]" (p. 357) and attributing personal qualities to them, highlighting how working with horses that are owned by another party can create ambivalence in horse-rider relationships. Emotional detachment in some circumstances was interpreted by participants as a competitive advantage, in other circumstances it constituted a competitive disadvantage, with inconsistency of contact between horse and rider and the presence of other figures in the relationship inhibiting the formation of a bond between horse and rider. The relationship between emotional (de)attachment and sporting success is clearly complex and may depend on whether a strong attachment is conceived as necessary for success, which may not uniformly be the case in equestrian sport.

9.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has addressed the connection participants drew between sporting performance and the horse-rider relationship. While a link was drawn between sporting success and strong horse-rider partnerships, ambivalence also marked participants' conceptions, with some suggesting a partnership is essential to success, and others noting how a range of factors determine sporting outcomes, suggesting that the importance of the

partnership to performance success must be contextualised. The partnership was also understood as detrimental to success in some circumstances. Equestrian athletes who take a detached, win-at-all-costs approach to equestrian sports were viewed as having a competitive advantage in some sports, although they were also considered less likely to maintain a successful long-term riding career. The connection between performances and the partnership differed according to sporting discipline, while participants defined success in subjective as well as objective terms.

Chapter 10 General Discussion

10.1 General Discussion, Implications, and Directions for Future Research

The current study aimed to explore the relationship between horse and rider in elite sport and develop an analytic framework for understanding how this relationship is conceptualised by elite equestrian athletes. A substantive theory of the horse-rider relationship in elite sport was constructed and the structure of this emerging theory is outlined below in Figure 1.

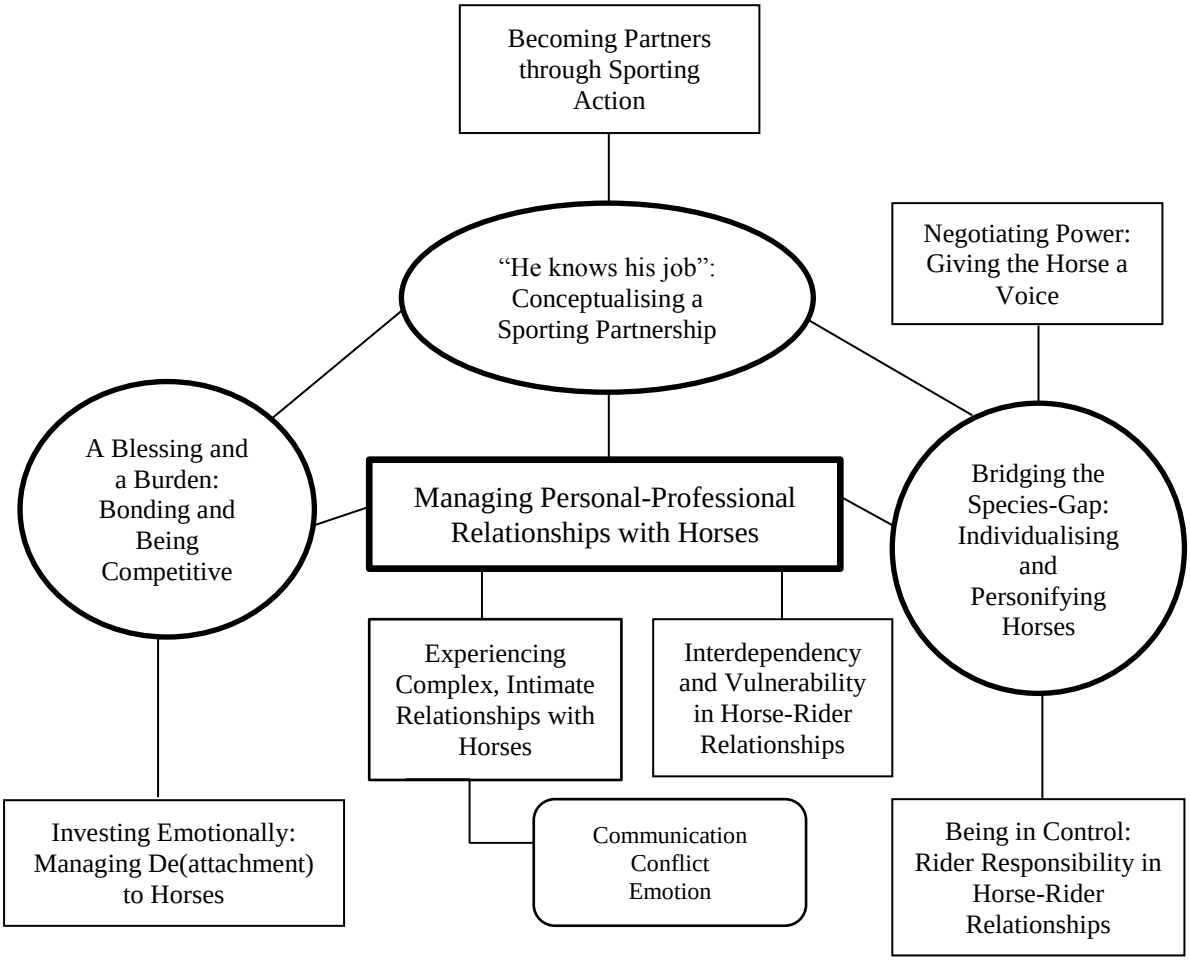

Figure 1. A Substantive Theory of Horse-Rider Relationships in Elite Sport

This preliminary theoretical model of the horse-rider relationship centres on the notion that horse-rider relationships in elite sport are defined by professional and personal relational dynamics, invoking a narrative of intimacy and shared work. These relationship elements manifested in communicative, emotional, and conflictual exchanges between horse and rider, while interdependency and vulnerability also characterised horse-rider interaction. Forming a jointly personal-professional relationship with horses had

implications for the way the horse-rider relationship was understood in a competitive context, and also influenced the language participants used to describe (a) their relationships with horses (e.g. relationships vs. partnerships) and (b) horses themselves. Both the professional and personal dimensions of the horse-rider relationship drew participants to carefully analyse the status of horses as a species, particularly with respect to power dynamics between horse and rider within and outside the sporting context. Participants described their horses as minded, intelligent, empathic creatures, with whom complex relationships were formed, while they also emphasized the ability of horses to reason, understand and actively influence horse-rider interaction. Horses were also viewed as capable of engaging in intersubjective, interpretive, and complex social exchanges (Sanders, 1993; Sanders, 2003). Positioning horses in this manner may have implications for the competitiveness of horse-rider dyads, as well as for the interaction that occurs between dyads.

Building on and extending Sanders (1993) research with dogs, Alger and Alger's (1997) research on cats, and Bogdan and Taylor's (1989) research on the disabled, participants experienced their equine partners as authentic, empathic, and reciprocating social actors. Through "the flow of interaction that comprises relationships" (Sanders, 2003, p. 418), participants formed understandings of their horses as unique individuals, however, attributions of personhood were not conveyed in static terms. In drawing on anthropomorphic and traditional explanations of animals, and animal behaviour, participants were able to account for the inequality of the horse-rider relationship whilst creating a sense of teamwork that emphasized the depth and mutuality of the horse-rider relationship and the intellectual abilities of horses. I have argued that these nuanced, fluid accounts of horses "made sense" to participants given their personal experiences, competitive and otherwise, of horses and allowed participants to shift between different understandings of horses, thus accommodating the (in)equality that defines horse-rider interaction.

The constructions equestrian athletes draw of their equine partners may carry important implications for horse welfare and the status of horses in sport. If we wish to fully understand animal minds, Hauser (2001) suggests, we need to engage deeply with animals across time and space, and thus participants' insights deserve careful examination. Participants' accounts were not accepted unquestioningly, however, and I sought to do more than provide a descriptive analysis of the research data. Reflexive considerations must also be drawn upon here. As a qualitative researcher and as an amateur rider well-

versed in the history of elite equestrian sports, I viewed my participants as "expert" on horses. Yet as a scientific researcher, I was aware of the ways in which participants' accounts conflicted with traditional scientific understandings of animal life. Simultaneously, I was confronted and intrigued by the "anthropomorphic" accounts participants provided, aware too of my own anthropomorphic understandings of horses.

As Gupta (2006) suggests, the language we use to describe animals demonstrates and influences our understandings of them, reinforcing or minimising species barriers, while Stibbe (2001) notes that language may buttress ideological assumptions that in turn serve to perpetuate the exploitation of animals in contexts such as the animal production industry. Language may also be used to conceal the nature of a social relationship. Finch (1983) contends that the marriage "partnership" is in fact a thin disguise for the subordination of women, who, like horses, are tied to the work agenda set out by their partner and are called upon to structure their lives around the pursuits of another, leading to a false sense of mutuality and egalitarianism in what is a largely unequal social relationship. The anthropomorphic properties of the horse-rider "partnership" have raised concerns within scientific circles, with some writing disparagingly (cf. McLean, 2003, 2008) and others with concern (Budiansky, 1997) of this allegedly inaccurate construction of horse-human interaction.

The findings of this study suggest that in positioning horses as intelligent and purposeful, though not entirely autonomous sporting partners, participants placed horses inside a moral community in which human actions, and the implications of these actions for equine welfare, had moral significance (Frey, 2011). Attributions about horses and horse-rider partnerships represented an important part of building emotionally connected, functional horse-rider relationships, while giving horses a voice and enunciating equine points-of-view appeared critical in enabling participants to make sense of horses and their relationships with them (cf. Birke, Hockenhull, & Creighton, 2010). McLean (2003, p. 12) may be right when he writes, "We can never really know what it is to be a horse," but humans are also inveterate meaning-makers, and as symbolic interactionism suggests, meaning-making is an interpretive, socially-construed process (Bartlett & Payne, 1997). Making empathic attributions and judgments about the mind of another has been called the "sine qua non of successful human relationships" (Thomas & Fletcher, 2003, p. 1079) and the findings of this study suggest that this may apply to inter-, as well as intra-species relationships. Understanding animals from a human viewpoint may be inevitably limited and problematic, but approximations of animals may be a lesser evil than ignoring or

reducing animal lives altogether (Haraway, 2003), with research suggesting that the attribution of human characteristics to animals may enhance the development of a trusting relationship (Billings et al., 2012), while as Bekoff (2008) states, "…it is also possible to read too little into the animals we watch" (p. 7).

Participants used the term "partnership" to describe a work- and goal-oriented relationship, though a partnership could also be affectionate and emotionally attached, with trust, mutual respect and understanding developed through the shared work of sport. In Alger and Alger's (1997) research on feline-human relationships, interaction between cat and human was also deemed goal-oriented, with cats seen as having goals, such as obtaining affection, and this reciprocity appeared to have important implications for relationship satisfaction. Social goals may also be pivotal to social, symbolic interaction and may be formed through a shared focus on an object or action or through a shared emotional experience (Collins, 1989). Authenticity and intimacy characterised and defined horse-rider partnerships, yet while participants identified with discourses of partnership and reported experiencing partnerships with horses, not all aspects of a partnership were easy to enunciate using language.

The emotional and communicative unity between horse and rider in partnership may be commensurate with Csikszentmihalyi's (1975/2000; 1990) concept of flow. Future research may explore how a corporeal connection with horses (Argent, 2012) influences equestrian athletes' experiences of flow. The specific dimensions of flow experiences for equestrians also deserve consideration. For instance, is flow sought after, but rarely attained in equestrian sport, as was the case in Jackson's (1992) research on ice-skaters, or does the connection and mindfulness that appears to characterise horse-human interaction (Burgon, 2013) make flow a more accessible or tangibly different type of experience in an equestrian context? Examining the physical, psychological, environmental, and relational dynamics that influence the development of flow states in equestrian sport may represent a valuable pathway for future research.

The connection between sporting performance and strong horse-rider relationships was approached with ambivalence by participants. A strong partnership allowed participants to predict their horse's behaviour and created confidence and a sense of connection and synergy that may be critical to sporting success, particularly given the highly-strung, sensitive temperaments of many elite horses and the anxiety transference that occurs in horse-human interaction (Bradley, 1993). Research has indicated that successful equestrians tend to experience less anxiety, and higher levels of self-confidence,

positive thinking, determination and concentration than their less successful counterparts (Meyers et al., 1999) and the horse-rider relationship appeared critical in moderating participants' experiences of some of these factors. Yet while a strong partnership could enhance performance, it was not always seen as essential for performance success, and in some contexts it was viewed as inhibiting success.

Sport has the capacity to be "both elevating and deflating, appealing and appalling, inspiring and disillusioning" (Eitzen, 2006, p. 225) and in equestrian sports this may be particularly the case because of moral concerns around using horses in sport. Equestrianism only indirectly contributes to the development of society and revolves predominantly around human fulfilment and leisure, with the use of horses in sport not necessary in the way that using horses for transport was once necessary, while as Midgley (1994) contends, "ambivalence has always been central to most of the ways in which humans use animals" (p. 193). As Bryant (2008) has noted, those involved in equestrian sports commonly espouse their love of horses and concern for horse welfare, but this has the potential to create dissonance around engagement in equestrian sport and this appeared to be the case for some participants in the current study.

Achieving performance outcomes will likely always be of critical importance in an elite sporting context and as Eitzen (2006) suggests, nowhere is the pressure to succeed greater than in an elite, professional sporting context, with this pressure bringing an increased risk of unethical behaviour. That participants who experienced close horse-rider relationships and valued their horses highly sometimes felt less competitive as a result suggests that an examination of the formal markers of success in elite equestrian sports is required. Where the achievement of success sits in opposition to horse welfare and horse-rider partnerships, equestrian athletes likely face major difficulties juggling horse welfare, a competitive sporting approach, the horse-rider relationship, and the expectations of team officials, owners, sponsors, and other athletes. Attention must also be paid to how equestrian athletes navigate a life-long career with horses that for a number of participants in the current study, had already involved the death or serious injury of a horse due to sporting activities. Alongside these concerns lies the emphasis participants placed on partnering horses in egalitarian ways, providing support for the contention that equestrian sport has the potential to be "not only morally defensible, but desirable" (Daspher, 2015, p. 17), though this may require active attention to the moral rights of animals and the development of a sporting culture in which being competitive and valuing animals are congruent.

Many participants appeared to, as Arluke (1994, p. 145) contends, simply "get on with the business of the institution" but this often required a certain measure of emotional detachment that may have adverse consequences for equestrian dyads in other ways. Closer consideration must be given to the emotion-management strategies that equestrians may adapt as a result of the physical and emotional risks implicit in elite equestrian sport. Despite their high-profile successes and elite status, participants reported experiencing significant, repeated setbacks during their sporting careers and the horse-rider relationship often served as a buffer during these periods. Future research may focus on examining the ways in which the horse-rider relationship facilitates a resilient approach to sport, and following the work of Buchanan and Dunn (2006), may examine how horse-rider relationships influence rider motivation in elite and amateur sporting contexts.

Constructions of the horse as a source of fulfilment and pleasure, as a sporting tool, and finally, as a sporting partner, are relevant to all the findings of this study and have been explored in this thesis. Binary understandings may be formed of dominance and democracy, work and pleasure, partnership and exploitation, yet these constructs are perhaps better understood in terms of Orwell's (2000, p. 35) "doublethink," wherein two opposing ideas or forces may be accepted and applied simultaneously, sometimes in tandem, depending on the demands of the situation. As Fox (2006) argues, traditional, "scientific" behaviour-based understandings of animals and "anthropomorphic" human-like understandings of animals can and do exist "side-by-side" (p. 527) and those who interact with animals may move between interpretations, integrating similarity and difference, humanness and animalness, and thereby breaking the binary between species. Of the animal-human companionship, Haraway (2003) writes "the relationship is not especially nice; it is full of waste, cruelty, indifference, ignorance, and loss, as well as of joy, invention, labor, intelligence, and play" (p. 12), a poignant reflection on the contradictions of interspecies relationships. Dashper (2015) has also highlighted the interplay between social power and partnerships in horse-rider relations; noting how attending to and partnering horses is inevitably countered by "human-centric power structures" (p. 14), meaning that, as found in this study, both equality and inequality may define horse-human interaction.

An interplay between emotional attachment and detachment underscored the findings of the current study and this may carry important implications for equestrian sports. The pressure to compete, train, and be competitive with a range of horses meant that emotional distancing could sometimes facilitate a business- and competition-oriented

approach to equestrian sport, especially when working horses for short periods in uncertain circumstances. Yet deeply personal horse-rider relationships may create an avenue for remarkable performances that exceed the horse's or rider's individual level of ability, and it was these attachments that participants believed fuelled their continued engagement in equestrian sport. The findings of the current study suggest that the increase in transient, instrumental horse-rider relationships may be causing a shift toward a more commercial, detached model of relating to horses and this shift deserves careful consideration.

In addition to structural forces such as the commercialisation of equestrian sport (cf. Dashper, 2014), the attitudes of modern riders may be a barrier to engaging in horsemanship practices facilitative of strong horse-rider relationships (Balkenhol, as cited by Collins, 2006). Participants viewed mundane, non-competitive encounters with horses as instrumental to relationship development, yet the pressure of striving to make money from and manage multiple horses made it challenging to engage with horses on this level, while some described the exclusively competition-based approach of other equestrians to horse-rider interaction. The dying art of horsemanship, evidenced in decreasing numbers of elite riders engaging in routine, daily activities around horses (e.g. such as brushing or saddling one's horse), was seen as contributing to a lack of knowledge of the horse, resulting in failures in the sporting arena to recognise changes in the horse's physical state, with potentially serious ramifications for horse welfare. In a similar vein, Coffin (1978) refers to the concept of "horsemen" versus "riders," according technical skill, but not an understanding of the animal, to riders, while the horseman, he writes, "knows all about that sensitive animal under him" (p. 117,).

The challenge of modern equestrian sport is such that while it may be ideal to be involved in all aspects of horse care and management and to spend leisure time with horses, for many elite riders this is not commensurate with running a business that revolves around horses. Yet as the ethics of equestrian sport continue to be scrutinised and calls are made for a paradigm shift to eradicate unacceptable and unethical practices in the sport (Sneed, 2014), it seems appropriate that all avenues of bringing about this paradigm shift be considered. While only a marginal degree of support currently exists for the complete abolition of equestrian sports (Campbell, 2013a), global attitudes toward horses in sport are shifting, with questions increasingly being asked by animal rights movements about not just horse racing, but all equestrian sports (Francione, 2010). The following question from Arluke (1994, p. 145) carries uncomfortable significance for equestrian sports, "…what is

it about modern society that makes it possible to shower animals with affection as sentient creatures while simultaneously maltreating or killing them as utilitarian objects?"

While the regulatory bodies of the equestrian industry appear to strive to ensure inhumane treatment of horses in sport is identified and punished (Bryant, 2008), recent incidents involving the disciplines of endurance and eventing have sparked considerable controversy with respect to the actual impetus of the FEI in attempting to prevent these occurrences (cf. Goddard, 2014; Reuter, 2010; Samuel, 2013). Course reform and other changes to equestrian sport have created a more welfare-oriented sporting landscape, but to a large extent the welfare of horses rests in the hands of their riders, a point conveyed by multiple medal-winning three-day event rider, Michael Plumb (as cited by Bryant, 2008, p. 140), who, with respect to the dangers of the cross-country phase in eventing, stated "…right now they're talking about fixing the jumps, but I think the answer is basic horsemanship." It is notable that changes designed to make equestrian sports safer, such as the short-format cross-country course and the omission of the steeplechase and roads-and-tracks phase in eventing, have not, as Bryant (2008) points out, been overly successful in making equestrian sports safer for horse or rider.

Given that re-integrating horsemanship practices into modern equestrian sport may be pivotal in strengthening horse-rider relationships, improving horse welfare and enhancing the competitiveness of equestrian dyads, it is worth considering different ways of incorporating less pressured forms of social contact with horses into the lives of elite riders, while the attitudes of modern riders also deserve closer consideration. Equestrian athletes must be encouraged to act as gatekeepers of equine welfare and well-being, and to encourage this, the consequences of acting in welfare-conscious ways towards horses must be aligned with performance outcomes. Several participants described how their engagement with horses and sport had improved since making the decision to seek income away from equestrian activities as this had allowed them to draw a clear distinction between work and working with horses. Access to alternate sources of income may help to preserve the personal fulfilment participants often associated with their relationships with horses and may also be facilitative of stronger, more engaged experiences of sport and sporting performances.

Participants' offered gendered interpretations of horse-rider relationships, with female participants emphasizing the importance of a relationship for female, but not for male riders, who they felt could achieve performance outcomes through domination (Bryson, 1990). This corroborates the findings of Gilbert and Gillett (2013) but

contravenes those of Dashper (2012) who argues that the horse's strength will always outweigh that of the rider. Conversely, male participants endorsed the importance of strong horse-rider relationships, yet on occasion presented detached images of their horse-rider relationships, in keeping with the masculinized ideals of professional sport (Gilbert & Gillett, 2011). Female participants also described having to defend their softness and emotionality toward horses, which often meant distancing themselves from traditional "horse girl" discourses Plymoth (2012). Yet emphasizing loving, affectionate relationships with horses may be a means of claiming femininity in a sporting context (Singleton, 2013; Gilovich, Keltner, Chen, & Nisbett, 2013).

Equestrian sports may present an opportunity to combine partnership-building skills (cf. Wipper, 2000) with more masculine sporting qualities, making the sport both appropriately feminine and empowering for female participants. This may vary from sport to sport, however, depending on how the relationship between horse and rider is constructed, an issue that deserves further consideration. Gilbert and Gillett (2013) found that female polo players expressed the view that for male players, horses were symbolic of a sporting tool, while Wipper (2000) did not describe a gendered dimension to the experiences of eventing riders in their relationships with horses. Para-equestrian participants also felt unable to force performances out of horses, reinforcing a sporting identity subordinate to masculine ideals (cf. Dashper, 2010) though the egalitarian relationships they constructed with horses were valued and even considered advantageous. The inclusion of male para-equestrians and more able-bodied male equestrians in future research may shed further light on these important gender and power dynamics in equestrian sport.

Given the link participants drew between sporting success and forming strong relationships with horses, it may be important for sport psychology interventions concerning equestrian athletes to address interpersonal skills and relationship management strategies, with performance enhancement strategies in sport psychology typically failing to address interpersonal skills (Morris & Thomas, 1995). As Jowett (2007a) notes with respect to coach-athlete relationships, effective and successful relationships are not easily established, they require sustained and deliberate effort and draw upon the "resourcefulness and interpersonal skills" (p. 70) of all involved. It is important not to assume that relationships develop without effort or that effective horse-rider relationships occur only between the gifted minority and cannot be enhanced through conscious effort and training. The nuanced understanding participants demonstrated with respect to conflict,

communication, and emotion in horse-rider relationships suggests that managing and facilitating effective conflict and communication may be pivotal to equestrian dyads, particularly with respect to preventing welfare and horse wastage issues, while the complex role of emotion and emotion management in dyadic relationships deserves further consideration.

The development of the substantive theory of the horse-rider relationship presented in this work represents another direction for future research. To fully explain the nature of elite equestrian dyadic relationships requires the ideas that have been outlined to be refined, developed, and "integrated at diverse levels of generality" (Henwood & Pigeon, 1992, p. 105), yet while limited opportunities for theoretical sampling inhibited the development of theory, the conceptions that have been developed are worthwhile, "rich, complex and dense" (p. 105), tolerant of and able to account for the indeterminacy and subjectivity of the phenomenon under consideration. In order to fully penetrate the theoretical categories that have been proposed the concept of ownership and its role in the formation of elite horse-rider relationships must be further examined. This could be achieved by exploring different representations of ownership in horse-rider relationships, and considering how a sense of ownership impacts feelings of control and accountability. Future research could also address whether ownership mediates the emotional attachment between horse and rider and how experiences of ownership in horse-rider relationships change over time and across sporting (i.e. amateur versus elite) contexts.

Future research may also consider how this substantive theoretical model, developed with reference to horse-rider sporting dyads, could be developed to provide a more general analytic appraisal of a process or issue relevant across multiple substantive areas (Charmaz, 2014). Future research must seek to elucidate a theoretical understanding of the horse-rider relationship that meaningfully explains this phenomenon and other related phenomena, such as interspecies relationships, at increasing levels of abstraction, without losing the interpretive strength and subjectivity of a substantive social constructionist theory. The theoretical import of this work may carry implications for interspecies relationships and perhaps even the study of interpersonal human relationships, sporting and otherwise. Of particular interest may be the means through which empathy and partnerships are experienced, and identity is relationally constructed outside the boundaries of linguistic communication (Sanders, 2003), in human and interspecies relationships. The theoretical underpinnings of the current study may also have important implications for bodily communication in both intra- and inter-species relationships.

This research raises important questions about animal mindedness and these questions have implications for scientific research practice as well as for animal advocacy. The complexities of horse-rider interaction suggest that speciesism invokes a simplified delineation between animals and people. By reintegrating the relationship between humans and animals into the broader spectra of complex and meaningful social interaction that makes up social life, and by conceiving of human-animal interaction as meaningful and even symbolic (Alger & Alger, 1997), psychological understandings of social phenomena and their implications for individuals and for society may be augmented. Further research is required to understand how those who interact with animals in both personal and professional contexts manage the contradictions, challenges, and complexities of interspecies relationships, emotionally and cognitively. The nuanced narratives participants built around (in)equality between horse and rider suggests that future research must also consider the interplay between interdependency, power, control, and vulnerability in interspecies dyads.

10.2 Limitations and Reflections on the Research Process

Why study the relationship between horse and rider? This question accompanied me throughout my PhD candidature as my perspective shifted between wondering what the findings of my research could mean for equestrian sport to considering the implications of the work for human-animal engagement in other contexts and interactive spaces. Research of this nature may shed as much light on how we see ourselves as on how we see animals, while Manning and Serpell (1994, p. xi) note the "profound significance" of animals in human life, a fact that has obvious ramifications for future social psychology research. As an animal enthusiast and horse rider, I am challenged by incidents of animal abuse in equestrian sport and by how to manage welfare concerns in a sporting context. The exploitation of animals, Serpell and Paul (1994, p. 141) writes, "…will only be reversed through the promotion of more respectful attitudes and behaviour, and anything which appears to aid in this process of attitudinal change is therefore worthy of detailed and urgent investigation." Understanding how athletes engage with horses in physically gruelling, euphoric experiences of performance and partnership stands to further scientific and personal knowledge of the status of horses in sport, along with the ethical and moral grounds of interspecies sport.

Just as I have acknowledged and examined the ways in which my participants have constructed and interpreted social realities in order to create social meanings, it must be acknowledged that the findings of this study are an act of interpretation (Bryant, 2002) that draws upon my own personal and professional understandings as a researcher and as an equestrian. This research is not only situated in time and place, it is situated in a personal set of values and interests that along with a symbolic interactionist lens, have limited what I can see in the data and the conclusions that I have drawn as meaningful and coherent. I do not claim to have penetrated all aspects of the phenomenon under consideration or to have theorised this issue fully or completely. It has been my aim to generate the beginnings of a theory of horse-rider relationships that is credible and useful, and generates new and meaningful ways of thinking about horse-rider relationships in sport. If I have been able to create insight on some aspects of the horse-rider relationship, I consider this work a provisional success.

As has been noted, only limited theoretical sampling defined the categories outlined and these require further refinement. The claims that have been made about the findings of this study are in keeping with these boundaries, however, and an attempt has been made to ensure claims drawn from this work are contextualised accordingly. With further development, a precise, integrated, and abstract grounded theory of horse-rider relationships, and perhaps even other categories of interspecies relationships, may be developed. It must also be noted that while this study has indicated that horse-rider relationships in sport are often intimate and personal, participants were asked to speak about horses that had stood out or had been special in some way during their careers, while equestrians who were particularly socially engaged with horses may have been drawn to participate in this study. My interview questions encouraged a discussion of significant, rather than insignificant relationships, though I did not dictate the sorts of horses or relationships that participants were to talk about. Participants described a range of relationships with horses as a way of juxtaposing and contextualising horse-rider relationships, significant and otherwise.

Qualitative research attempts to access psychological phenomena in ways that remain true to and reflect the complexity and meaning of social life, yet not even qualitative inquiry can directly access, or capture social phenomena completely (Willig, 2012). Moreover, as Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) point out, research methods are only more or less useful for a particular purpose, they are not in themselves inherently valid, an important counterpoint to the sense of assurance that may come from using the finely

delineated methodological strategies of grounded theory. I have attempted to construct a relevant, fair, authentic and educative account of the relationship between horse and rider in elite sport, but this account is also limited, partial, and incomplete, a snapshot of a complex phenomenon at a single point in time, constructed through a singular lens. The following quote from Mol and Law (2002, p. 21), summed up an issue I grappled with throughout this study, particularly during data analysis:

> …in a complex world there are no simple binaries. Things add up *and* they don't. They flow in linear time *and* they don't. They exist within a single space and escape from it. That which is complex cannot be pinned down. To pin it down is to lose it [italics original].

I hope to have retained and done justice to as many of the complexities and nuances that I observed in the data as possible, yet as Willig (2012, p. 164) states, meaning is fluid, fragile, always changing. Experience, and in particular, experiences of relationships, change continually and do not necessarily make sense. Thus to create a coherent analysis that "makes sense" is to distance oneself from the contradictions of human experience, especially as they pertain to social interaction (Willig, 2012). It was critical that my analysis acknowledged contradictions, inconsistencies, and fragmented accounts within and between participants, as these speak to the fluidity of meaning in social relationships, yet I also needed to avoid getting lost in the complexities of social life and draw tangible, meaningful conclusions. Langley (1999) has stated that sense-making in qualitative research has the potential to permit a reproduction of those subtleties that convey the ambiguity of human life. This, together with a desire to further scientific understanding of an important category of interspecies relationship, has fuelled this research work.

My categories have developed out of my participants' experiences and the language they used to represent their experiences, yet as Morse et al. (2009) states, the final representation of the data belongs at least in part to the researcher who constructed the final analysis. This raises problematic questions of power, control, and ownership in qualitative research. When analysing data and writing these results chapters, I have often wondered what my participants' reactions and responses to the analysis might be. Would they be embarrassed, disappointed or feel misrepresented to see that I have drawn on what I perceived as tensions in their narratives around the value of horses in sport, despite the fact that amidst these tensions, a great love and passion for horses was evident in many

narratives? Or would they be grateful to see recognition of these issues and their implications for athletes attempting to be both ethical *and* competitive in an elite context?

In, "transcending [the] bigger picture," as Glaser (2002a, p. 25) puts it, grounded theory shifts away from the individual and moves toward a representation of the collective, a logical aim of theory generation. Yet, what is a theory if those who participated in giving voice to it do not recognise themselves and their narratives, stories, and experiences in it? Is Glaser (2002a, p. 25) right when he states "grounded theory is not their voice"? Should the validity or quality of the products of a grounded theory study be judged in accordance with the extent to which participants recognise and resonate with the theoretical conceptions that are drawn from the data (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992)? Moreover, as Brandt (2005) notes with respect to the issue of representation, research that implicates both animals and humans involves double representation, creating further complexities. As a researcher I speak for my participants, and my participants have spoken for their horses. Just as my representations are incomplete, so too are the representations participants offered of their horses and their relationships with them. Giving primacy to participants' viewpoints enabled me to develop a theory directed towards the concerns most central to those riders whom I interviewed, and the explanatory power of these theoretical notions are grounded in participants' accounts. Yet theorising is an ongoing process (Charmaz, 2014) and further data collection will undoubtedly lead to further theoretical developments.

The findings of the current study represent what Milliken and Schreiber (2012, p. 688) refer to as "…an abstraction of the phenomenon of interest that includes and honours the participants' experience of it, but is not bounded by it." The categories and nascent theory of this work have been grounded in the meaning-making processes of participants and the researcher. They are also a product of the perspective afforded by symbolic interactionism, and the documentary and media-based materials, as well as extant literature, that I engaged with in an attempt to develop my categories over the course of the study (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012). Thus the findings of the study are grounded in participants' data but have been created within an interactive space in which a new discourse must find its place within existent systems of meaning and ways of understanding horse-rider interaction (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). It is not a description of the individuals who participated in the research and consequently may not be recognisable on a personal level to participants, particularly given that their accounts were not routinely accepted and reproduced at face value.

10.3 Concluding Thoughts

From a reflexive standpoint, the findings of this study led me to consider my identity as an amateur equestrian. I began to wonder what this project meant for my own sporting participation and my beliefs about equestrian sport. I have never been comfortable with horse racing and wholeheartedly agree with the abolition of jumps racing, but what did I think about the ethics of equestrian sport? There is no simple answer to this question and my answers are only partially relevant to this research. Yet considering such issues led me to reflect on the existential space that defines horse-rider interaction and to consider how language, context, and social interaction inform human perspectives of horses and horse-rider relationships. As a researcher and a member of the equestrian sporting community, the findings of this study have furthered my desire to explore the antithetical relationship that may exist between sporting success and strong horse-rider relationships in elite and perhaps even in amateur equestrian sport. Examining the link between performance outcomes and horse-rider relationships across sporting disciplines and contexts may contribute in important ways to the growing dialogue within and outside science about questions of horse welfare in equestrian sport. It is hoped that the findings of this research contribute to an acknowledgement of the importance of relationships in interspecies sport. The future of equestrian sports may depend on exploring the ways in which a strong horse-rider partnership encourages ethical and humane sporting practices, with such practices pivotal to the development of a professional sporting milieu in which sentient life and interspecies relationships are valued.

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Appendices

12.1 Appendix A

Information Sheet – Participants

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Dear Research Participant

My name is Rachel Hogg and I am undertaking a series of studies as part of a Doctoral degree requirement at Charles Sturt University, under the supervision of Dr Gene Hodgins, a senior lecturer in Psychology, and Dr Ross Lorimer, a lecturer in Sport and Exercise Science.

The title of this project is: **Equestrian partnerships: Development and psychometric validation of a measure of the horse-rider partnership.**

We are interested in the partnership between horse and rider in competitive equestrian sports. Our research involves an investigation of the relationship between horse and rider, aimed at generating a body of knowledge to be used in creating a psychometrically sound, quantitative measure of the horse-rider partnership. While the partnership between horse and rider is frequently documented in popular literature, little scientific attention has been paid to this unique sporting relationship, despite the fact that equestrian dyads collectively constitute a substantial proportion of the athletic population in Australia. This study aims to create a deeper understanding of the interactive and complex relationship between horse and rider, a central component of equestrian sports. We believe this type of research is necessary to develop an understanding of how the horse-rider partnership operates within a competitive sporting context.

In order to deepen our understanding of the horse-rider partnership, we are conducting a series of focus group and individual interview sessions, in which participants will be asked to contribute their views on the horse-rider partnership. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and each participant will be assigned a pseudonym in order to protect their identity. The interview and focus group sessions may be video or tape-recorded for the purposes of recording the interview data accurately. These recordings, along with interview transcripts and other data, will be stored in a secure location, in accordance with Charles Sturt University's (CSU) and the Australian Psychological Society's (APS) ethical guidelines. The data collected for this study will be analyzed by the research team to identify any themes and key ideas which emerge from the interview sessions.

Only my supervisory team and I will have access to your interview data. Once analyzed, the results will be used to help us develop a psychometric measure of the horse-rider partnership. The data obtained in this study will be reported in my PhD thesis and may be published in a scientific journal or via other mediums.

Participation in this study involves engaging in an interview session, which will take approximately 40 to 90 minutes. Questions will be asked about your involvement in equestrian sports, your partnership with your horse(s) or your observations of other horse-rider partnerships, and what you see as the main features of a horse-rider partnership. Please only agree to participate in these sessions if you are 18 years of age or older and are a current or former amateur, sub-elite, or elite rider, an equestrian coach, judge, horse trainer, vet, sport psychologist or other individual involved with the development of competitive equestrian dyads (i.e. grooms, family members/partners).

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the pre-interview schedule attached and forward it to the following email address: horsegal_rach_@hotmail.com. Please also read and sign the consent form attached, which outlines what will be expected of you as a participant in this study.

Some participants may find that involvement in these interview sessions raises distress or concern about their own or others psychological health. If at any stage you wish to discuss these concerns further you may wish to contact your general practitioner or consider calling either the Lifeline hotline on 13 1114 for immediate assistance, or the Australian Psychological Society's (APS) Psychologist Referral Service on 1800 333 497, to get information about psychologists in your area. If you have any questions regarding this study or encounter any problems please contact me on 0427 064 810, or horsegal_rach_@hotmail.com. Alternatively you may contact my supervisor, Gene Hodgins, on (02) 6933 2746, or ghodgins@csu.edu.au.

NOTE: Charles Sturt University's School of Psychology Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Presiding Officer:

The Presiding Officer
School of Psychology Ethics Committee
Charles Sturt University
Panorama Avenue
Bathurst NSW 2795

Tel: (02) 6338 4061
Fax: (02) 6338 4401

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Thank you very much for your time.

Rachel Hogg

12.2 Appendix B

Information Sheet – Associations

CHARLES STURT
UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS
School of Psychology

Bathurst Campus:
Building C6, Panorama Avenue
Bathurst NSW 2795
Tel: (02) 6338 4580

Wagga Wagga Campus:
Locked Bag 678
Wagga Wagga NSW 2678
Tel: (02) 6933 2249

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Rachel Hogg and I am undertaking a series of studies as part of a Doctoral degree at Charles Sturt University, under the supervision of Dr Gene Hodgins, a senior lecturer in Psychology, and Dr Ross Lorimer, a lecturer in Sport and Exercise Science.

The title of this project is: **Equestrian partnerships: Development and psychometric validation of a measure of the horse-rider partnership.**

We are interested in the partnership between horse and rider in equestrian sports. Our research involves an investigation of the relationship between horse and rider, aimed at generating a body of knowledge to be used in creating a psychometrically sound, quantitative measure of the horse-rider partnership. The partnership between horse and rider is frequently documented in the popular literature, yet little scientific attention has been paid to this unique sporting relationship. Equestrian dyads collectively constitute a substantial proportion of the athletic population in Australia, and to date have not been extensively researched. The horse-rider partnership is a central component of equestrian sports, with the success of equestrian dyads dependent on the interactive and complex relationship between horse and rider. I believe this type of research is crucial in order to improve understanding of how the horse-rider partnership operates within a competitive context.

It would be greatly appreciated if I could use your association/club as a way of recruiting participants for this study. I would like permission to approach members of your association to discuss my research and offer them an information sheet detailing what would be involved in participating in this study. I would also like permission to recruit members of your association by advertising my research through your website, via email, or using other means. Only my supervisory team and I will have access to the interview data obtained during this study, which will remain confidential and will be stored appropriately and destroyed after the completion of the study.

If you are interested and willing for your association to become involved in this research could you please contact me via email: horsegal_rach_@hotmail.com.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me on 0427 064 810. I would be pleased to discuss my research at a convenient time for you.

Thank you very much for your time.

Regards

Rachel Hogg

12.3 Appendix C

Consent form

I, _____, agree to participate in the research project regarding Equestrian Partnerships: Development and Psychometric Validation of a Measure of the Horse-Rider Partnership.

I have read and understand the information sheet given to me, including that:

- This research project is being undertaken by researchers from Charles Sturt University in order to collect qualitative data on the horse-rider partnership, to be used in designing a measure of the horse-rider partnership.
- I understand that the findings of the research and excerpts from my transcript may be reported in the principal investigator's doctoral thesis and used for publication.
- I have been informed of the nature of the project.
- I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, should I so choose without any adverse consequences.
- I understand that any identifying information about me gathered in the course of this research is confidential and will not be used or published without my written permission.
- I understand that the interview will be recorded.
- I understand that I will be expected to respect the privacy of others in focus group sessions.
- I understand that I may be asked to check my transcript for accuracy and give my opinion on the research team's interpretation of my interview data.

I am aware that Charles Sturt University's Ethics in Human Research Committee has approved this study.

I understand that if I have any complaints or concerns about this research I can contact the principal investigator of the research project, Rachel Hogg - Charles Sturt University, on 0427 064 810 or alternatively I can contact:

The Presiding Officer
School of Psychology Ethics Committee
Charles Sturt University
Panorama Avenue
BATHURST NSW 2795

Tel: (02) 6338 4061
Fax: (02) 6338 4401

Signed by: _____

Date: _____

OR, if submitting this electronically, please place an 'X' in the box below to indicate that you have read this form and filled it in completely and that you certify as above:

Agreement ☐ Date:

12.4 Appendix D

Pre-Interview Inventory

By answering the following questions, you are providing the research team with some preliminary information which helps them decide how best to contact you and arrange an interview. Please either type or write in the blanks and put a cross in the brackets to indicate the answers which apply to you. Please return this sheet via email to horsegal_rach_@hotmail.com as soon as possible.

Name:

Location:

Email address:

Phone number (landline or mobile):

For the following items, please place an x in the box(es) which apply to you.

Age:

( ) 18-25 years
( ) 26-35 years
( ) 36-45 years
( ) 46-55 years
( ) 56-65 years
( ) 65+ years

Gender

( ) Male
( ) Female

Which of the following categories apply to you:

(NB: "Elite" refers to current or former elite squad members, "sub-elite" refers to current or former development squad members and "amateur" refers to all EFA/FEI riders competing below this level, or riders not affiliated with the EFA/FEI)

( ) Elite rider
( ) Sub-elite rider
( ) Amateur rider

( ) Former elite rider
( ) Former sub-elite rider
( ) Former amateur rider

( ) Equestrian coach

( ) Judge
( ) Horse trainer
( ) Vet
( ) Sport psychologist
( ) Other (i.e. groom, family member/partner of an EFA/FEI affiliated rider)

If you are a rider or a former rider, with which of these disciplines are you/were you involved?

( ) Jumping
( ) Dressage
( ) Eventing
( ) Carriage driving

( ) Show riding
( ) Tent pegging
( ) Vaulting
( ) Endurance riding

( ) Reining
( ) Para-equestrian
( ) Other

( ) Western
( ) Polo/polocrosse
( ) Pony club/adult riding club

Please indicate some possible time(s) and days when you would be available to be interviewed in the next month.

( ) Monday-Friday
( ) Sunday

( ) Morning
( ) Afternoon
( ) Evening

If appropriate, please indicate a specific time and date in the next month when you would be available to participate in an interview session.

Please indicate whether you would prefer to be interviewed in a group session or individually.

( ) Focus group
( ) Individual interview

By agreeing to participate in an interview session, you are agreeing to answer questions about your involvement in equestrian sports, your partnership with your horse or your observations of other horse-rider partnerships, and what you see as the main features of a horse-rider partnership. Please feel free to read the following examples of some topics which may be discussed in the sessions and consider your views on these areas prior to participating in an interview session.

1: What do you think are the main features of a horse-rider partnership?

2: What is it like to work together with your horse? Describe a typical session and what you might do together.

3: Tell me about your best performance or your ideal performance with your horse.

4: Are there any personality traits or characteristics that you consider are important for an athlete in a two-person team, such as in equestrian sports?

5: Do you consider elements such as cohesion and communication to be important in the functioning of equestrian dyads?

12.5 Appendix E

Interview Schedule

**Assign pseudonym*

Demographic/background questions

1. Could you start off by telling me a little bit about your background in equestrian sports?

   Probe: What disciplines are you involved in?

   Probe: How long have you been involved in equestrian sports?

2. Approximately how many horses do you currently work/compete?
3. How long have you been working with your current horse?. (Former riders: How long did work with your former equine partner?)
4. How much time do you spend on average with your horse each week?

Horse-rider interaction

5. Has there been a horse with which you consider yourself to have shared a special relationship? Or do you feel they've all been about equal?

   (If yes) Probe: What do you think lead to this special bond?

6. How would you describe the relationship between you and your horse(s)?

   Probe: Tell me about the interaction you have with your/this horse.

7. What is it like to work together with your horse? Describe a typical session and what you might do together.

8. How do you and your horse act when interacting (around each other) during training and/or competition?

Partnership in equestrian sports

9. Would you consider the relationship between horse and rider a "partnership"?

   Probe: Why? Why not?

10. Is there a difference between a relationship and a partnership with a horse?

    Probe: What distinguishes a partnership from a relationship?

    Probe: How would you define a partnership between horse and rider?

11. What do you think are the main features/markers of a horse-rider partnership?

12. How does this partnership between horse and rider form/begin?

    Probe: At what point do horse and rider become "a partnership"/"partners"? (Is there a definable point or is it a gradual process, impossible to define?)

13. How would you describe an effective, or ideal, horse-rider partnership?

    Probe: What are the key elements that characterise equestrian dyads?

14. How would you describe your partnership with your horse in comparison to this ideal?

    Probe: In what ways is your partnership with your horse different from your ideal horse-rider partnership?

<u>The horse-rider partnership and performance</u>

15. Do you feel that the partnership you have with your horse contributes (directly or indirectly) to your performance/success?

    Probe: In what ways does a "good" partnership with a horse contribute to success?

16. Tell me about your best/ideal performance with your horse.

17. Tell me about a time when you felt the quality of your partnership with your horse affected your performance (positively or negatively)?

    Probe: Tell me about a time when you were/were not working well with your horse.

<u>Specific attributes of the horse-rider partnership</u>

18. Are there specific qualities you need to be an equestrian athlete and work together with a horse?

    Probe: Are there any personality traits or characteristics that are important for an athlete in a two-person team, such as in equestrian sports?

19. Do you consider cohesion (or harmony) to be important in the functioning of equestrian dyads?

20. Do you feel complementarity is important in equestrian dyads?

21. Do you think communication is important in the functioning of equestrian dyads?

    Probe: How do you communicate with your horse?

22. Are there any challenges specific to working as a team with a horse in equestrian sports?

23. Do you see the dyad partnership in equestrian sports as being similar to other dyadic sports (tennis doubles, ice skating pairs, synchronized swimmers)?

Probe: In what ways are equestrian partnerships and other sporting dyad partnerships similar?

24. Do you feel the dyad partnership in equestrian sports is different to other dyadic sports (tennis doubles, ice skating pairs, synchronized swimmers)?

    Probe: In what ways are equestrian partnerships and other sporting dyad partnerships different?

25. Is there anything else you would like to add to what we have discussed or anything we haven't discussed which you would like to talk about?

12.6 Appendix F

Pilot Interview Feedback Sheet

Thank you for being involved in piloting this interview schedule on the partnership between horse and rider in equestrian sports. Your contribution helps us ensure our questions are comprehensive, easy to understand, and that we have covered the topic matter as broadly as possible, as well as helping us identify areas needing improvement in the way the interview was conducted. Using the following inventory, please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements.

		Not at all	A little bit	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely
1.	The interview questions were clear and easy to understand.	0	1	2	3	4
2.	The interview questions allowed me to express what was important to me.	0	1	2	3	4
3.	I felt comfortable answering the interview questions.	0	1	2	3	4
4.	The interview questions were confusing and ambiguous.	0	1	2	3	4
5.	The interview questions made me feel uncomfortable.	0	1	2	3	4
6.	The interview questions allowed me to discuss important aspects of my partnership with my horse.	0	1	2	3	4
7.	The interview was conducted in an appropriate location.	0	1	2	3	4
8.	I felt able to disclose information concerning myself freely in the interview session.	0	1	2	3	4

9.	The interview session was free from avoidable interruptions.	0	1	2	3	4
10.	The interview was conducted in a comfortable and non-distracting environment.	0	1	2	3	4
12.	I felt able to disclose information concerning my partnership with my horse freely in the interview session.	0	1	2	3	4
13.	The interview was conducted in a professional manner.	0	1	2	3	4
14.	The interviewer allowed me to express what was important to me in the interview session.	0	1	2	3	4
15.	The interviewer made me feel comfortable and at ease during the interview session.	0	1	2	3	4
16.	The interviewer showed interest in what I was saying during the interview.	0	1	2	3	4
17.	The interviewer made me feel uncomfortable during the interview session.	0	1	2	3	4
18.	The interviewer responded appropriately to my responses during the interview.	0	1	2	3	4
19.	The interviewer appeared to listen carefully to my responses.	0	1	2	3	4
20.	The interviewer clearly explained any queries I had about the project (i.e. regarding	0	1	2	3	4

	the interview sessions, consent and confidentiality, information about the study outcomes etc).					
21.	The information sheet made clear the topic of the research project.	0	1	2	3	4
22.	The information sheet highlighted what would be expected of me as a participant.	0	1	2	3	4
23.	The consent form clearly highlighted what was expected of me as a participant in this study.	0	1	2	3	4
24.	The pre-interview inventory was easy to follow and understand.	0	1	2	3	4

25. Was there anything that wasn't covered in the interview session, which should be included?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please indicate what should be included in the space below.

_____

_____

_____

_____

26. Was there anything that was covered in the interview session, which should be omitted?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please indicate which items you think should be omitted and why in the space below.

_____
_____
_____
_____

27. What could the interviewer improve about the way these interviews were conducted?

_____
_____
_____
_____

28. Please list any additional comments or feedback (Feel free to make any comments or criticisms you wish. These may regard the content of the interviews, the setting in which the interview was conducted, or the way in which the interviews were run, or anything else you feel is relevant).

_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. The information you have provided is a very valuable contribution to our study of the horse-rider partnership in equestrian sports.