

**Performance development of adolescent equestrians:
A Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) approach**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Ilé Louisa Schutte, hereby declare that this mini-dissertation is my own original work. Where secondary material is used, it has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with university requirements. Neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or shall be submitted for another degree at this or any other university, institution or examining body.

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ABSTRACT

The Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) approach is a sport psychology programme aimed at performance development in athletes. This study set out to gain an understanding of how adolescent equestrian athletes experienced this programme, using an in-depth qualitative approach called interpretive phenomenology analysis (IPA). Four equestrians, three females and one male, ranging in age from 16 to 18 years, completed an experiential learning-based programme over a two-day period. Semi-structured interviews were subsequently conducted with each participant to gain an understanding of their experience of the programme in terms of (1) their learning regarding the programme; (2) possible application of the learning to equestrian sport; and (3) possible transference of the learning to other areas of their lives. The interviews were transcribed and analysed according to the principles of IPA and the findings pertaining to each participant are discussed in terms of the most significant themes identified during the interviews. The concluding chapter discusses both the common and the unique findings obtained from the participants' accounts in relation to the existing literature. The findings of this study highlight the importance of the partnership between equine and human when applying MAC in equestrian sport and also illustrate the applicability of MAC, not only in equestrian sport, but also in other areas of an adolescent's life. This project contributes to sport psychology since it is the first qualitative study describing the experiences of adolescent equestrians regarding the MAC approach.

Keywords: mindfulness, acceptance, commitment, equestrian sport, performance development, sport psychology, interpretive phenomenology analysis

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description of abbreviation	Chapter
ACT	Acceptance and commitment therapy	Chapter 2
BPD	Borderline personality disorder	Chapter 2
BT	Behaviour therapy	Chapter 2
CBT	Cognitive behaviour therapy	Chapter 2
CT	Cognitive therapy	Chapter 2
DBT	Dialectical behaviour therapy	Chapter 2
EQ1	Equestrian 1	Chapter 3
EQ2	Equestrian 2	Chapter 3
EQ3	Equestrian 3	Chapter 3
EQ4	Equestrian 4	Chapter 3
GAD	Generalised anxiety disorder	Chapter 2
hpc	High Performance Centre	Chapter 1
HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa	Chapter 3
IPA	Interpretive phenomenology analysis	Chapter 3
ISR	Institute for Sport Research	Chapter 3
MA	Master of Arts	Chapter 1
MAC	Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment	Chapter 1
MBCT	Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy	Chapter 2

MBSR	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction	Chapter 2
MCS-SP	Multilevel Classification System for Sport Psychology	Chapter 1
MSI-E	Mental Skills Inventory for Equestrian Riders	Chapter 2
MSPE	Mindful Sport Performance Enhancement	Chapter 2
OCD	Obsessive compulsive disorder	Chapter 2
PD	Performance development	Chapter 1
Pdy	Performance dysfunction	Chapter 1
PI	Performance impairment	Chapter 1
PST	Psychological skills training	Chapter 1
PT	Performance termination	Chapter 1
SA	South Africa	Chapter 1
SAEF	South African Equestrian Federation	Chapter 1
UP	University of Pretoria	Chapter 1
USA	United States of America	Chapter 1

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

Introduction

Chapter 1 of this mini-dissertation serves as an introductory chapter to orientate the reader to the context, background, questions, goals and motivation for the current study. The context of equestrian sport will also be discussed and the chapter will conclude by giving an outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 CONTEXT

1.1.1 University of Pretoria

The University of Pretoria (UP) was established in 1908 and is one of the leading research universities in South Africa (SA). It is also one of the largest universities in the country and comprises seven campuses, as well as other sites of administration such as the Steve Biko Academic Hospital and the High Performance Centre (hpc¹). The hpc is the site where the present study was conducted (see 1.1.3). The UP offers more than 1800 academic programmes, most of which are presented in both English and Afrikaans. These programmes are offered in nine faculties, which include 140 departments, as well as 85 centres, institutes and bureaus. The UP's status as a university with a high research output has been recognised since 1996 (University of Pretoria [UP], 2012a).

1.1.2 Psychology Department

The Department of Psychology is one of eighteen departments within the Humanities faculty at the UP. The department offers three Master of Arts (MA) programmes: MA (Research Psychology), MA (Clinical Psychology) and MA (Counselling Psychology). These programmes are based on a 50% research and 50% practitioner model;

¹ The official abbreviation for the High Performance Centre is "hpc" and not "HPC".

therefore in order to complete the degree a research project must be completed and a research report handed in, in the form of a mini-dissertation (Human, 2008).

1.1.3 High Performance Centre

The hpc is a multifaceted sport centre situated on the UP sports grounds in Pretoria (Gauteng). It was launched in May 2002 (see 4.1.1). Services at the hpc include psychological services, nutritional services, medical services, physiotherapy and biokinetics. In the following section the focus will be on the psychological services offered at the hpc, as this study falls within the sphere of sport psychology.

1.1.3.1 Psychological Services

Psychological services at the hpc are dedicated to the TuksSport High School athletes and include individual counselling sessions and psycho-educational modules and programmes that are aimed at assisting the athletes with performance development in their particular sport. Psychological services at the hpc are implemented according to the Multilevel Classification System for Sport Psychology (MCS-SP), which was developed by Gardner and Moore (2006). Frank Gardner and Zella Moore (2006), both clinical sport psychologists in the United States of America (USA), developed the MCS-SP in response to the need to eliminate the discrepancy that existed between the two fields of sports counselling and sport psychology. Previously, the field of sport psychology was dominated by performance development strategies/approaches, whereas the field of sports counselling dealt only with personal problems or personal development (Gardner, 2009; Gardner & Moore, 2006; Human, 2004; Petrie & Watkins, 1994). The consequence of this dualistic approach was that athletes were often caught up in a pattern of being referred from a sport psychologist to a counselling/clinical psychologist and vice versa. By contrast, the MCS-SP allows a single practitioner to work with athletes in a holistic way by providing four levels on which to categorise the athletes. Categorising the athlete on one of these four levels (each with two subtypes) allows the practitioner to provide the athlete with a suitable intervention tailored to the needs of the specific athlete at a specific time.

The four levels and their subtypes, as depicted by Gardner and Moore (2006), will now be discussed:

1. Performance Termination (PT)

For many athletes, particularly professional athletes, having to end a competitive career can have detrimental psychological effects. Whether this is a voluntary or involuntary event, athletes may struggle to cope with its implications and therefore refer themselves or are referred to a sport psychologist². Such athletes would be placed in this category.

PT-I: Sublevel PT-I encompasses athletes who retire voluntarily from their competitive careers. The retirement can be the result of various reasons including a natural decline in performance as a result of aging.

PT-II: Athletes categorised on sublevel PT-II have been forced to retire unexpectedly or involuntarily. This is often because of serious injury but can be due to other changing life events as well. Although athletes on both levels may suffer serious psychological consequences, the athletes in the latter group may experience the effects more severely.

2. Performance Impairment (PI)

Athletes who are experiencing severe distress resulting from a clinically diagnosable disorder would be placed in this category. This means that not only their performance but also other aspects of their lives are being affected and that the athlete may even be forced to postpone competing as a result. The athlete is therefore in need of psychological treatment and may also require medication.

² The term "sport psychologist" is used as a general term in SA. It is not an official Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) registration category. I will use this term to refer to a registered psychologist, irrespective of the HPCSA registration category, working in the sport context in SA.

PI-I: The type of disorder experienced by the athlete and the way in which it affects the athlete's participation in sport is what distinguishes the two sublevels. Athletes experiencing significant impairment resulting from clinical disorders, such as eating disorders, anxiety disorders or mood disorders, would be placed in PI-I. The effects of the disorder may be so severe that the athlete is almost or completely incapable of competing for a period of time.

PI-II: Athletes who suffer from disorders that specifically affect their behaviour in such a way that an external source forces them to limit or stop competing for a period of time would fall in this sublevel. Such athletes may suffer from personality disorders, impulse control disorders or drug abuse which may lead to team suspension or even to being arrested.

3. Performance Dysfunction (Pdy)

Within this category the athlete would typically be experiencing subclinical factors or barriers that hamper their performance.

Pdy-I: On the first sublevel the barrier is something external to (or outside) the athlete. This can include contextual factors, such as a taxing relationship, parents getting a divorce or an unfamiliar environmental setting.

Pdy-II: The barriers on this sublevel would be something internal in (inside) the athlete that is often triggered or exacerbated by the stresses of the competitive environment. Examples would be an athlete who is experiencing heightened fear of failure, self-pressure or perfectionism.

4. Performance Development (PD)

Athletes, who are generally functioning well and require only psychological conditioning as a means to improve or maintain their performance, would be placed on this level. If, after initial interviewing and assessment, it is found that the individual has no underlying psychological concerns, the focus would be merely on performance development. It would then be up to the sport psychologist to decide

whether to use traditional methods such as psychological skills training (PST) or newer approaches such as the mindfulness-acceptance-commitment (MAC) approach (both of these approaches will be discussed in chapter 2). The two subtypes on this level are:

PD-I: Athletes who are still developing their physical skills and who would benefit from receiving psychological guidance in the form of a performance development programme are generally placed on this sublevel. Accordingly, amateur or youth athletes would make up the majority of this category.

PD-II: The main difference in this subtype compared to the first is that the athletes on this sublevel are already performing at a high and probably professional level. They are therefore looking for psychological conditioning in order to perform at their best and to maintain such a level of performance.

As the participants of the present study were adolescent athletes with no underlying psychological difficulties, they were categorised on the PD level of the MCS-SP, subtype PD-I. Athletes are assessed regularly at the hpc by the resident psychologist to determine on which level they should be placed.

1.1.3.2 Programme

Sport psychology programmes are presented to the athletes at the hpc as part of their curriculum, with the focus being on performance development and including both PST and MAC programmes. The nature of these programmes, however, is not sport-specific and they are presented in general across all the different sport academies. Not only are the programmes generic, but in some instances they are presented to a group of athletes from different sport academies simultaneously. The current study included a MAC programme³ that was specifically tailored and adapted so as to be sport-specific, focusing exclusively on equestrian sport. Moreover, it was presented to equestrian athletes only, excluding athletes from any other academy,

³ The original MAC programme (Gardner & Moore, 2007) was adapted to form a programme consisting of five modules, each based on experiential learning principles. The programme was specifically designed to be used with adolescents.

thereby introducing a unique approach to performance development in the context of the hpc.

1.1.3.3 Research

Currently, no research studies have been conducted at the hpc on performance development sport psychology programmes that have been used with athletes. This study will therefore contribute to knowledge on such programmes, which may assist in the efficacy and implementation of sport psychology at the hpc in the future.

1.2 EQUESTRIANISM

1.2.1 Equestrian Sport in South Africa

For this project, the sport context was equestrian sport. Equestrian sport in South Africa is governed by the South African Equestrian Federation (SAEF).⁴ The SAEF is an umbrella body encompassing the multiple categories of equestrian sport, for example dressage, show jumping, eventing, showing, vaulting, Western riding, equitation, driving and endurance⁵ (South African Equestrian Federation, 2013).

In South Africa equestrian sport has grown steadily over the last decade. The level of riders, trainers and sports horses is on the incline. As an example, in the year 2000 (when I was in Grade 8), equestrian sport was first incorporated as a school sport on a small scale in Gauteng. Currently, the Gauteng Interschool series of competitions is attracting numerous schools and hundreds of competitors competing in various categories of equestrian sport (A. Brink, personal communication, May 7, 2013).

1.2.2 Uniqueness of Equestrian Sport

As mentioned above, equestrian sport encompasses various categories of competition and although these types of competition differ to a great extent, they all

⁴ For more information on the SAEF visit www.saef.org.za

⁵ For a short description of the various categories of equestrian sport see Appendix E.

have one thing in common, that is, “the horse”. This is what distinguishes equestrian sport from other sports– it involves a partnership between human and animal.

Wolframm and Micklewright (2010) indicate that equestrian sport is unique in that it depends on the horse–rider dyad; both parties being mutually dependent. Ideally, the communication between horse and rider will be clear and effective with the horse responding in a submissive and desirable way; however, since a horse is an animal with its own will, needs and motivation, this is not always the case. Being animals that were originally preyed on in the wild, horses may at times respond in a violent or explosive manner when faced with perceived danger, making equestrian sport a particularly dangerous sport.

Wipper (2000) illustrates the importance and the intricate nature of communication between horse and rider. The horse communicates through its body language, specifically its ears, eyes, legs and tail, thus indicating its needs, wishes, moods and states (such as fear, excitement, irritation and nervousness). The rider also communicates through his or her body in the form of aids and signals, making use of positive and negative reinforcement to tell the horse what to do. Wipper (2000) further states that experienced riders who are sensitive to their horse’s communication signs, can anticipate how their horse will behave in a particular situation and may give a corrective aid before the horse carries out the anticipated action.

Wolframm, Shearman, and Micklewright (2010) note that riders often state that their horses can detect their mood state and react to it; moreover, Wipper (2000) indicates that horses are particularly sensitive to the moods and emotions of their riders which in turn will affect their own state as illustrated by the following statement: “The muscle responses of a skilled, confident rider relax and embolden horses, whereas tense, nervous riders transmit fearful messages that make them nervous” (Wipper, 2000, p. 60).

In their study, Tenenbaum, Lloyd, Pretty, and Hanin (2002) found evidence suggesting that an effective partnership between horse and rider is of great significance for performance in equestrian sport. An effective partnership would be

characterised by aspects such as compatibility, mutual trust, respect, confidence and communication. This partnership is, however, vulnerable to misconduct or mistakes on the rider's part that may damage or even destroy it (Wipper, 2000).

Although the MAC programme was designed for the "athlete" it is not a given that all athletes from different sports will find it useful and applicable to the specific sport they participate in. This project endeavoured to discover the meaning of MAC as experienced by equestrians in relation to the unique context of equestrian sport.

1.3 QUESTIONS

The study was guided by three primary questions. These questions are as follows:

1.3.1 Research Question 1

What do adolescent equestrians learn experientially about performance development through their participation in an equestrian-specific MAC programme?

1.3.2 Research Question 2

How do adolescent equestrians anticipate applying what they have learnt experientially about performance development through their participation in an equestrian-specific MAC programme to their sport?

1.3.3 Research Question 3

How do adolescent equestrians anticipate transferring what they have learnt experientially about performance development through their participation in an equestrian-specific MAC programme to other areas of their lives?

1.4 GOALS

1.4.1 Outcome Goal

The general goal of this research project was to create an opportunity for equestrian adolescents to learn experientially about performance development through their participation in a sport-specific MAC programme, while also reflectively anticipating how to apply their learning to their sport and how to transfer their learning to other areas of their lives.

1.4.2 Process Goals

- 1.4.2.1 Literature:
1. To conduct an overview of the topic psychological skills training (PST) in sport (see 2.1.3).
 2. To conduct an overview of the topic mindfulness-acceptance-commitment (MAC) in sport (see 2.2.3).
- 1.4.2.2 Research:
1. To conduct an overview on the research on PST in sport (see 2.1.4).
 2. To conduct an overview on the research on MAC in sport (see 2.2.4).
- 1.4.2.3 Inquiry:
1. To describe the selection criteria for participants of the study.
 2. To describe the research design and methodological process followed in conducting the study.
 3. To discuss ethical considerations regarding the study.
- 1.4.2.4 Programme:
1. To develop a sport-specific MAC performance development programme, adapted for use with adolescents.
 2. To facilitate the programme with adolescent equestrian athletes.

3. To reflect on equestrians' experience of the programme using semi-structured interviews.
4. To analyse the data collected during the interviews.

- 1.4.2.5 Findings:
1. To report the findings of the research project in a mini-thesis.
 2. To report the findings of the research project in a peer-reviewed academic journal.

1.5 MOTIVATION

1.5.1 Academic Motivation

This study forms part of the academic requirements for the completion of my MA (Counselling Psychology) degree. The course duration is two years of which the first focuses on theoretical modules and the second on practical work at various placements. The course offers a choice between two elective modules, community psychology and sport psychology. I chose sport psychology as an elective module. The writing of this mini-dissertation contributes 50% of the degree.

1.5.2 Research Motivation

From a researcher's perspective, the motivation behind the study was to understand how adolescent equestrians experienced this programme on performance development: what they learnt experientially about the concepts, as well as how they would be able to apply them to both their sport and other areas of their lives. I chose equestrian sport because of my own interest in the sport, having participated in show jumping for roughly 12 years and still continuing to do so. How the participants made sense of the concepts in relation to their horses was of particular interest to me, as the interdependence of athlete and horse makes equestrian sport unique in the field of sport.

The lack of qualitative research on MAC was also a motivating factor, seeing that most of the studies on MAC are quantitative studies (see 2.2.4), using a pre-test and

post-test format with the aim of proving the efficacy of the programme. The present study set out to gain an understanding of how equestrian athletes made sense of the MAC programme, as opposed to testing its efficacy. Furthermore, although a limited number of studies have been conducted on the use of PST in equestrian sport, no studies have been done on the use of MAC in equestrian sport. This study therefore addresses the void in the existing literature regarding qualitative studies on MAC and specifically within the field of equestrian sport.

1.6 STRUCTURE

Chapter 1 has served as an introduction and has provided a description of the background of the present study. The context has been discussed, as well as the research questions pertaining to the study. Finally, the goals of the study have been described as well as the motivation for doing the study.

Chapter 2 introduces the programme used in this study and gives an account of both PST in sport and the MAC approach. This is done with reference to the origin, philosophy and concepts pertaining to each approach. The relevant literature and the critique of studies in both PST and MAC are also discussed. Lastly, the reasons for choosing MAC as the focus of this study are discussed.

Chapter 3 describes the research inquiry of this study. It specifically refers to the research context, the participants, the research design used in the study, as well as the ethical considerations pertaining to this study.

Chapters 4 to Chapter 7 present the findings of the research with regard to the individual participants' experiences of the MAC programme.

Chapter 8 serves as a final discussion of the findings and presents a comparison of the individual participants' experiences of the MAC programme, as well as in relation to the relevant literature. The limitations pertaining to this study and opportunities for further studies are explored.

Conclusion

After reading this chapter, the reader should have a clear indication of the context of this project, as well as a basic idea of the relevant background to the study. The questions the research is attempting to answer should be clear as should the motivation for conducting the research. The reader should be oriented in terms of the goals of the research project and should have a basic idea of what to expect from the succeeding chapters. Chapter 2 will focus on the two performance development programmes presented at the hpc, namely, PST and MAC.

CHAPTER 2 PROGRAMMES

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the relevant history of- and advances in performance development in the field of sport psychology. More specifically, the two performance development approaches used at the hpc will be described: firstly Psychological Skills Training (PST) and, secondly, the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) approach. This will be done with regard to the origin, philosophy and psychological skills/practices relating to each approach. Research done on both of these approaches will also be discussed as well as critique pertaining to such research. Lastly, the MAC approach as the focus of this study will be discussed.

2.1 PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT IN SPORT PSYCHOLOGY: PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILLS TRAINING (PST)

2.1.1 Origin

PST is essentially a cognitive behaviouristic approach with the aim of developing and enhancing athletic performance. To understand the theoretical underpinnings of PST one has to understand where it originated from within the development of the broader scope of behaviour therapy⁶ (BT). The three waves⁷ of BT will be discussed with the intention to situate the reader with regard to the origin and development of PST and MAC (Öst, 2008; Hayes, 2004).

2.1.1.1 First Wave Behaviourism

BT started its development in the early twentieth century during a period when much emphasis was placed on gaining knowledge in a scientific (positivistic) manner (Öst, 2008). Prominent theorists who contributed to the development of BT included Ivan

⁶ “Behaviour therapy” is used to describe the entire range of behavioural as well as cognitive behaviour approaches.

⁷ The word “wave” refers to a generation of therapeutic approaches that are similar in their methods, underlying assumptions and goals by which theory and practice are directed.

Pavlov, John B. Watson and Burthuis F. Skinner (Avis, Pauw, & Van der Spuy, 2004). The first wave of BT could be seen as a rebellion against the existing clinical forms of therapeutic intervention, which seemed to have insufficient empirical validation (e.g. psychodynamics). Therefore, early behavioural therapists, argued that there is a need for psychology to be scientifically verifiable, much like the philosophies and methods used in the natural sciences such as biology and physics. Consequently, in the developing stages of behaviourism, the view was that knowledge should be based on objective facts and, thus, only the observable aspects of human behaviour were studied and included as being instrumental in therapy (Hayes, 2004; Öst, 2008). The focus of therapy was on observable problematic behaviours and the replacement of these with alternative more adaptive behaviours through a process of conditioning, learning and reinforcement (Avis, Pauw, & Van der Spuy, 2004).

2.1.1.2 Second Wave Behaviourism

The second wave in the broader field of BT was initiated by cognitive therapy (CT), which was developed in the 1960s by Aaron Beck. During the late 80s and early 90s BT and CT merged, forming what we know today as cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), the most popular second wave therapeutic approach with the largest evidence base (Öst, 2008; Rector, 2013; Wright, Basco, & Thase, 2006). Whereas during the first wave only observable behaviour was the central focus, the second wave of therapies began to study the way cognitive content (thoughts) influences our emotions and ultimately our behaviour (Hayes, 2004). Therefore, in order to change unwanted behaviour, one has to first change the thoughts related to these behaviours. The approaches used were didactic and simplistic (as were the first wave approaches) in that they were based on the principles of cause and effect and problem and solution (Hayes, 2004; Hofmann & Asmundson, 2008; Wright et al., 2006).

The underlying principles of PST stem from the two above-mentioned waves in BT, specifically the second wave. The aim is for the athlete to control internal experiences (thoughts, emotions and physical sensations) by identifying negative

internal experiences and changing them to positive internal experiences by focusing on cognitive content.

2.1.1.3 Third Wave Behaviourism

In contrast to the first two waves of BT, where behaviour and/or cognition were viewed in isolation as being problematic, the third wave therapies place an emphasis on the context in which the behaviour takes place, and aims to change the function of the behaviour rather than directly changing the behaviour itself. These interventions venture into areas of less empirical forms of assessment and psychotherapy and include such concepts as acceptance, mindfulness, values, spirituality and relationship. The third wave therapies are not necessarily opposing the first- and second wave approaches, but rather build on these types of treatments in a more flexible manner, focussing on second order and experiential change (Hayes, 2004; Hofmann & Asmundson, 2008; Öst, 2008). Some third wave therapies, specifically Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), will be discussed later in this chapter (see 2.2.1.2) as it pertains specifically to the origin of MAC.

2.1.2 Philosophy

As mentioned above, PST is based mainly on the CBT philosophy, which postulates that a particular situation or event triggers certain thoughts which, in turn, lead to emotions as well as physiological responses, ultimately resulting in certain behaviour (Wright et al., 2006). Therefore, in order to modify behaviour, one must intervene at one of these intervals, which will then carry over to the next response (see figure 2.1). PST is specifically focused on teaching the athlete various skills that will enable him or her to avoid or replace unwanted thoughts, emotions, physiological responses and behaviour with more desirable ones. If negative thoughts are changed to positive thoughts through self-talk, for example (see 2.1.3.3), this will lead to positive emotions, favourable physiological responses and a better chance of desirable performance in the end (Gardner & Moore, 2006; 2007; McCarthy, Jones, Harwood, & Olivier, 2010).

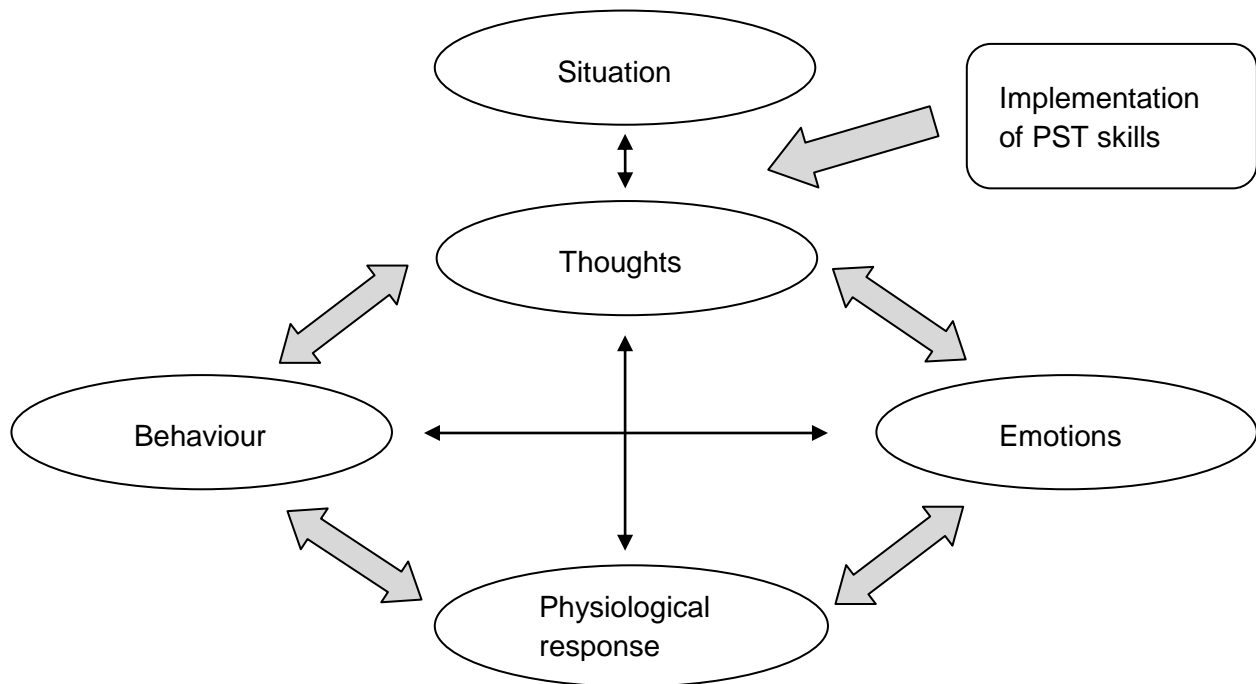


Figure 2.1 Philosophy underlying PST

2.1.3 Psychological Skills

Relevant studies investigating PST in equestrian sport most commonly focused on goal setting, imagery, self-talk, relaxation techniques (which is one of the skills pertaining to arousal control) and concentration training (which included precompetitive routines) (Blakeslee & Goff, 2007; Wolframm & Beck, 2013; Wolframm & Micklewright, 2011a; 2011b). A brief discussion of these aforementioned skills will follow below.

2.1.3.1 Goal Setting

This skill refers to the establishment of specific goals as they apply to the specific athlete in their sport. Goals differ in relation to the time in which they are set to be achieved, for instance an athlete may have a variety of short-, medium- and long-term goals. Goals focus specifically on the outcomes, individual performance and processes that are relevant to the athlete and his/her sport, along with the level of competing. It is suggested that goal setting may assist athletes in being motivated and dedicated to achieving their goals (Behncke, 2004; Gardner & Moore, 2007).

2.1.3.2 Imagery

Imagery is used to recreate a past experience or create a future experience in the mind by including as much sensory stimulation as possible. Imagery can either be done from an external or an internal perspective. When done from an internal perspective, the athlete pictures himself/herself executing a certain performance/skill as seen from their own perspective (first person). From an external perspective, the athlete pictures him/herself watching him/herself perform, as if they were an onlooker (third person). It is suggested that the reason that imagery can enhance performance is that it has both a cognitive function in that the athlete can mentally rehearse specific skills and strategise their performance, and a motivational function in that it assists the athlete in controlling emotions (avoiding unpleasant emotions and feelings such as anxiousness) and overcoming obstacles (Gregg & Clark, 2007; Hecker & Kaczor, 1988; Jones, 2003).

2.1.3.3 Self-talk

Self-talk is a CBT technique used to restructure cognitive content and, thus, to replace unwanted thoughts and/or feelings with productive thoughts and/or feelings. One such example is the positive self-affirmations used to promote a sense of self-belief and confidence by thinking complimentary or ego-boosting thoughts. Another type of self-talk can consist of repeating technical or tactical instructions that include task-specific content. Finally, mood words can be used to maintain a desired feeling or emotional state and to assist in controlling arousal levels (Behncke, 2004; Hatzigeorgiadis, Zourbanos, Mpoumpaki, & Theodorakis, 2009).

2.1.3.4 Arousal Control

Arousal control methods are used to assist the athlete in the personal regulation of their physiological arousal levels. This supports the philosophy behind PST that there is an ideal state that an athlete should be in to perform optimally. If arousal levels are found to be too high, various relaxation techniques are used to induce a calming effect (e.g. breathing exercises). If arousal levels are too low, techniques are used in order to “psych” athletes up and create a heightened sense of arousal. One

such method can be to listen to music, which can have a calming or excitatory effect depending on the type of music (Behncke, 2004; Hung, Lin, Lee, & Chen, 2008; Jones, 2003).

2.1.3.5 Concentration Training: Precompetitive Routines

Precompetitive routines include the execution of a sequence of specific behaviours by the athlete preceding a competition. These behaviours can include verbal behaviours and thoughts (covert processes), as well as specific motor behaviours or actions (overt processes). Using such routines is believed to reduce distracting stimuli and enhance concentration. It may also give the athlete a sense of control in an unfamiliar setting, as well as aid in maintaining physiological arousal at a desired level thereby enhancing performance. Precompetitive routines are specific to each individual utilising them, therefore the athlete can engage in behaviours that he/she is comfortable with and that gives him/her a sense of readiness to compete (Cohn, Rotella, & Lloyd, 1990; Gardner & Moore, 2007).

The following section gives a review of the available literature on PST, specifically as it pertains to equestrian sport.

2.1.4 Research

It emerged from the available literature that limited research studies have been conducted on PST in equestrian sport.⁸ Four studies were found which will be described below with regard to context, discipline, sport, participants, methodology and findings.

2.1.4.1 Context (Countries)

Two studies have been conducted in the Netherlands (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2011a; 2011b), one in the USA (Blakeslee & Goff, 2007) and one in Germany

⁸ The terms “psychological skills” and “mental skills” seemed to have been used interchangeably and both were used to conduct a literature search.

(Wolframm & Beck, 2013). To date, no research has been conducted in South Africa on PST in equestrian sport.

2.1.4.2 Discipline

Three of the studies were conducted within the discipline of veterinary behaviour (Wolframm & Beck, 2013; Wolframm & Micklewright, 2011a; 2011b) and one was done within the discipline of sport psychology (Blakeslee & Goff, 2007).

2.1.4.3 Sport

All four studies were specifically aimed at equestrian sport; however, in equestrian sport there are many different categories/disciplines (see Chapter 1, section 1.2.1). The two studies of Wolframm and Micklewright (2011a; 2011b) focused only on the discipline of dressage, while Blakeslee and Goff (2007) did not specify in which discipline their participants competed. Wolframm and Beck (2013) included participants competing in various disciplines, namely, dressage, show jumping, eventing, leisure riding, Western riding and vaulting.

Although publications are limited, it is pleasing to note that some research on PST has been done in a relatively marginalised sport such as equestrianism. Despite the growth of equestrian sport in SA (see 1.2.1), it is still not a mainstream sport in this country. To date no published studies on PST in the sport of equestrianism have been conducted in SA in any of its categories.

2.1.4.4 Participants

Three of the studies examined included riders on all competitive levels (amateur to elite) (Blakeslee & Goff, 2007; Wolframm & Micklewright, 2011a; 2011b) while one study did not specify the competitive levels of participants (Wolframm & Beck, 2013). The study by Blakeslee and Goff (2007) included only female participants, while Wolframm and Beck (2013) included both males and females in their study and the remaining two studies did not specify the gender of the participants (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2011a; 2011b).

None of the studies specified the inclusion of participants under the age of 18 years (Blakeslee & Goff, 2007; Wolframm & Beck, 2013; Wolframm & Micklewright, 2011a; 2011b).

2.1.4.5 Methodology

Three of the studies reviewed were quantitative in nature (Blakeslee & Goff, 2007; Wolframm & Beck, 2013; Wolframm & Micklewright, 2011a) and one study included mixed methods research (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2011b). The sample sizes were mostly very small, ranging from 10 to 18 participants (Blakeslee & Goff, 2007; Wolframm & Micklewright, 2011a; 2011b).

No published studies of a qualitative nature are available on PST in equestrian sport; most studies aimed to test the efficacy of the approach and not to gain insight into participants' experience of the programme.

2.1.4.6 Findings

Three of the four studies examined aimed to identify the effect of PST on equestrian athletes' performance (Blakeslee & Goff, 2007; Wolframm & Micklewright, 2011a; 2011b). The findings of both Wolframm and Micklewright's studies (2011a; 2011b) were conclusive, in that PST improved the performance of the participants. One of Wolframm and Micklewright's studies (2011a) did, however, hypothesise that PST would decrease anxiety during performance. This was in fact not the case as the study found that anxiety levels remained the same; therefore the improvement in performance was not due to a decrease in anxiety levels. The study of Blakeslee and Goff (2007) also hypothesised that PST would improve the participants' performance; however, their results did not support their hypothesis, as there was no significant improvement in the participants' performance when comparing the test group to the control group after receiving PST. The aim of Wolframm and Beck's (2013) study was to develop a psychometric inventory measuring mental skills in equestrian sports (MSI-E), using factor analysis. On the basis of their findings, they included four factors in the inventory, namely: (1) dealing with difficult situations, (2) goal setting, (3) arousal control and (4) imagery.

It can be inferred from the preceding discussion that there is a need for more research to be conducted on PST in equestrian sport, specifically qualitative studies, and studies including various equestrian disciplines and youth athletes.

2.2 PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT IN SPORT PSYCHOLOGY: MINDFULNESS-ACCEPTANCE-COMMITMENT (MAC)

2.2.1 Origin

2.2.1.1 Origin of Mindfulness

This section describes the origin of mindfulness and gives an indication of the way in which mindfulness has infiltrated modern psychology.

1. Mindfulness in Eastern Philosophy

Although mindfulness is relatively new to Western psychology, it is in fact an age-old concept in Buddhist meditation practices. Buddhism originated in Northern India about 2 500 years ago and mindfulness has been said to be the “heart” of Buddhist meditation. It is, however, not just a form of meditation, but rather a conscious state that, if practised regularly and correctly, becomes a way of life (Grossman, 2010; Huxter, 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Buddhism teaches that each of us has the potential to develop an internal observer. As humans we are conditioned to have a critical or judgemental stance with regard to what we observe, whether it be our feelings, thoughts or physical experience. By using mindfulness as a continuous meditation practice, Buddhists claim that we can train our internal observer to be uncritically aware of what we are experiencing in each present moment, thereby bringing what we are experiencing in the present moment into consciousness, without casting judgement, and merely letting it be (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Follette, Palm, & Pearson, 2006; Grossman, 2010; Huxter, 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Kang & Whittingham, 2010; Weiss, 2009).

Although mindfulness originated from Buddhist practices, it is in fact not confined to any one religion. As human beings we are all inherently mindful to some degree at various stages or intervals. However, the way in which it was originally applied in Buddhist meditation practices provides us with guidelines for using this inherent ability more effectively in all aspects of our lives today (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Follette, Palm, & Pearson, 2006; Grossman, 2010; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Weiss, 2009).

2. Mindfulness in Western Psychology

The term “mindfulness” has become well used in recent times and it has infiltrated the field of psychology in diverse ways. To date, mindfulness technologies have been used in modern psychotherapeutic practice to treat a wide range of psychiatric conditions and interpersonal problems, including intractable physical pain, recurrent major depression, borderline personality disorder (BPD), obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), general anxiety disorder (GAD), social phobia and recurrent suicidal behaviour. A few of the best known therapeutic mindfulness programmes include Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) and ACT (Baer, 2003; Folette et al., 2006; Hayes, 2004; Ivanovski & Malhi, 2007; Kang & Whittingham, 2010; Mace, 2007).

2.2.1.2 Origin of Acceptance-Commitment

The second and third fundamental constructs in the MAC approach, namely, “acceptance” and “commitment”, stem largely from ACT. ACT was developed by Hayes, Strosahl, and Wilson (1999) and is a prominent third wave BT approach (Ruiz, 2010). This approach is aimed at normalising behaviour rather than defining behaviour as abnormal. It is also less didactic in that it does not look for a cause of problematic behaviour, but rather looks at the relationship and experience of the person together with his/her thoughts and behaviour in a specific context (Hayes & Strosahl, 2004; Hofmann & Asmundson, 2008; Öst, 2008; Rector, 2013; Vilardaga, Hayes, & Schelin, 2007).

According to ACT, we are bound as human beings to experience a certain amount of suffering as a result of unpleasant cognitive or emotional experiences and it is our attempts to avoid these experiences that lead to psychological “problems” in the first place. Behaving in a way that makes negative experiences (discomfort) more pleasant is termed “experiential avoidance”. According to ACT, we do not have to engage with or respond to all our thoughts as if they were facts, but should rather accept our thoughts as being an automatic human experience that does not necessitate a reaction (this is termed “cognitive diffusion”). The fundamental philosophy underlying ACT is therefore that human well-being is not the absence of all unpleasant internal experiences, but rather that one can be a well-functioning, psychologically balanced individual while experiencing a certain amount of unpleasant internal experiences (or “suffering”) by applying acceptance (Hayes, 2004; Hayes & Strosahl, 2004; Hayes & Wilson, 1994).

2.2.1.3 Origin of Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) in Sport

The MAC approach is a modern acceptance-based and value-driven approach to performance development created specifically for sport populations by Frank Gardner and Zella Moore, both of whom are clinical sport psychologists from the USA. The approach encompasses essentially a combination and adaptation of mindfulness training along with ACT. Gardner and Moore decided to develop the approach after experiencing success with acceptance-based behavioural interventions in a therapeutic setting. When developing the approach, they viewed the athlete or “performer” holistically, taking into account the fact that each individual is different. They also recognised that the “performer” is not immune to life stressors and therefore has to manage environmental factors along with general life concerns, while experiencing the pressure and environmental demands of having to perform at an elite level. The MAC approach is therefore a holistic approach to performance development aimed at improving performance, as well as developing problem-solving, decision-making and behavioural responses in the athlete’s everyday life (Gardner & Moore, 2004; 2006; 2007).

2.2.2 Philosophy

Since MAC is an extension of ACT, the underlying fundamental philosophy on which the approaches are based is essentially the same. MAC also postulates that the internal experiences of thoughts and emotions (negative and positive), as well as bodily sensations, are an inevitable part of being human that cannot be controlled or eliminated. Like ACT, MAC believes that avoidance strategies to control or change unwanted internal experiences (as implemented during PST) are ineffective and can at times do more harm than good (Gardner & Moore, 2004, 2006, 2007).

MAC states that athletes can perform optimally in the presence of discomfort caused by internal experiences, bodily sensations and environmental stimuli and, consequently, that one does not need to be in an ideal performance state in order to perform well. Being an acceptance-based approach, MAC focuses on the awareness and acceptance of the present discomfort of the athlete within the context. Although MAC is an acceptance-based approach, it is also a value-driven approach (as is ACT). The aim is to identify and establish the athlete's personal performance values (that which the athlete regards as important in their competition life) and to assist the athlete to be able to act according to these values on a continuous basis (commitment), which will ultimately enhance performance (Gardner & Moore, 2004, 2006, 2007; Kee & Wang, 2008; Schwanhausser, 2009).

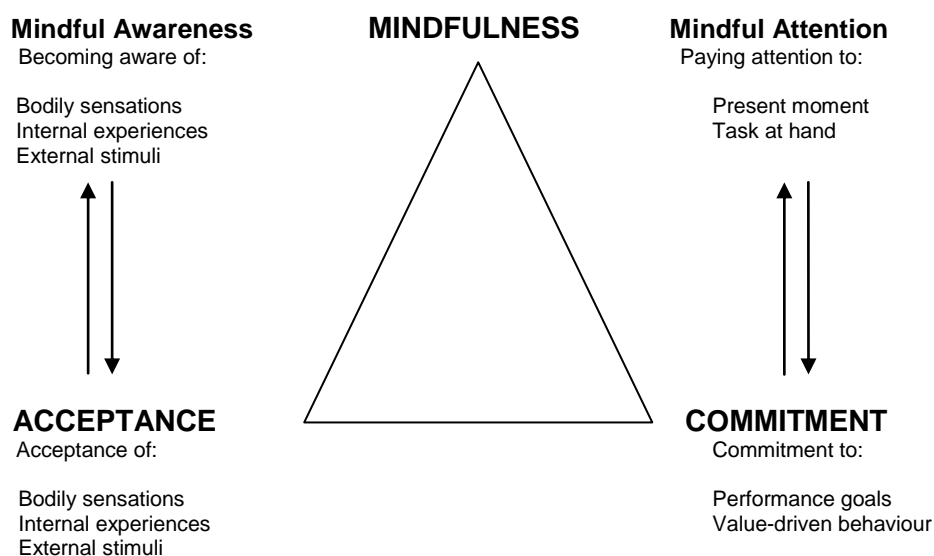


Figure 2.2 Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment philosophy

The above figure (figure 2.2) visually illustrates the philosophy of MAC and indicates the basic principles underlying the three concepts of mindfulness, acceptance and commitment. It also depicts the difference between mindful awareness and mindful attention, all of which will be described in more detail below.

2.2.3 Psychological Practices

The following section describes the MAC concepts as indicated by Gardner and Moore (2007) in their programme.

2.2.3.1 Mindfulness versus Mindlessness

1. Mindfulness

Mindfulness, as presented by Gardner and Moore (2004, 2007), can be divided into two parts: (1) mindful awareness, which means being aware of and noticing bodily sensations, internal experiences and external stimuli without judgement; and (2) mindful attention, meaning to purposively pay attention in the present moment to the task at hand. Being mindful is described to the athlete as being completely immersed “in the moment” of one’s performance activity with an acute sense of self-awareness in a non-judgemental manner (Bernier, Thienot, Codron, & Fournier, 2009; Brown & Ryan, 2003, 2004; De Petrillo, Kaufman, Glass, & Arnkoff, 2009; Gardner & Moore, 2004, 2007; Gooding & Gardner, 2009; Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

2. Mindlessness

The opposite of being mindful is to be mindless. This happens when our “mind” and body are not in the same place at the same time (if we are doing one thing while thinking of another) or if one is unaware of what one might be experiencing at a given moment. As humans we tend to be mindless quite often – we are constantly worrying about the future or reminiscing about the past, which means that we are not mindful of the present (Gardner & Moore, 2007). An example in the sport context would be for an athlete to worry about writing a test the following day while in the

middle of a competition. The athlete's thoughts are thus in the future and not the present, which could potentially distract him/her from the task at hand.

2.2.3.2 Acceptance versus Avoidance

1. Acceptance

Acceptance can be defined as having a neutral awareness of any particular experience. Therefore not fighting against the experience, not trying to change or avoid it and not attempting to judge it as good or bad. The MAC approach emphasises the fact that it is humanly impossible to stop ourselves from thinking or feeling. In fact, MAC suggests that trying to stop ourselves from having specific internal experiences may actually increase these unwanted experiences. However, by becoming aware of what we are in fact experiencing in the present (through exercising mindfulness) we have the option to accept these experiences and not try to change them. Acceptance requires a non-judgemental attitude and an openness to endure temporary discomfort in the pursuit of long-term success (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Gardner & Moore, 2007).

2. Avoidance

Avoidance, on the other hand, is maintained by efforts to control or eliminate bodily sensations, internal as well as external experiences. Experiential avoidance is a short-term solution for avoiding discomfort. An athlete struggling with a particular skill pertaining to their sport may neglect to practise this skill as it causes uncomfortable feelings of frustration and thoughts of inadequacy and may choose to focus on a different skill in which they are more accomplished. This may offer short-term relief, but it does not benefit the athlete in the long term; in fact it may have a negative impact on the athlete's overall performance. MAC also believes that purposeful experiential avoidance shifts the athlete's focus away from their task and often proves to be futile (Gardner & Moore, 2004, 2007; Fletcher & Hayes, 2005).

2.2.3.3 Commitment versus Motivation

1. Commitment

Commitment, as described in the MAC approach, implies that the athlete chooses to engage continuously in behaviours in service of their values (values-directed behaviour) even if this does on occasion produce some discomfort. Therefore, by being more mindful and by being willing to accept rather than avoid present uncomfortable internal experiences, the athlete can choose to behave according to their identified values rather than to act on their thoughts or emotions. To do this persistently is seen as commitment (Gardner & Moore, 2004, 2007; Moore, 2009).

2. Motivation

Motivation, as described by Gardner and Moore (2007), is the desire to achieve a certain goal, but accompanied by a lack of the needed actions or behaviours to reach this goal. Many people are motivated to accomplish some form of goals or make improvements to their lifestyle; few however succeed in persistently carrying out the actions needed to achieve their goals. Motivation is a necessary ingredient in the life of an athlete, as it may be the driving force towards success; however, without commitment motivation alone is unlikely to produce results.

2.2.4 Research

Because the MAC approach has only recently been developed (2006), limited research on MAC has been published and no research has been done on MAC in equestrian sport. Therefore, all the published studies done on MAC in any sport will be described in terms of context, discipline, sport, participants, methodology and findings:

2.2.4.1 Context (Countries)

The countries in which research on the MAC approach has been conducted include Singapore (Kee & Wang, 2008) and France (Bernier et al., 2009), but most studies

have been done in the USA (De Petrillo et al., 2009; Gooding & Gardner, 2009; Hasker 2010; Kaufman, Glass, & Arnkoff, 2009; Schwanhausser, 2009; Thompson, Kaufman, De Petrillo, Glass, & Arnkoff, 2011; Wolanin & Schwanhausser, 2010).

In reviewing the literature it became apparent that research on the MAC approach has yet to be conducted in a developing country like SA. SA therefore provided a unique context for the current study.

2.2.4.2 Discipline

All of the research done on the MAC approach has been done within the discipline of sport psychology (Bernier et al., 2009; De Petrillo et al., 2009; Hasker, 2009; Gooding & Gardner, 2009; Kaufman et al., 2009; Kee & Wang, 2008; Thompson et al., 2011; Schwanhausser, 2009; Wolanin & Schwanhausser, 2010).

As with all the studies examined in the literature review, this study was conducted within the discipline of sport psychology. This was also in accordance with my elective subject of sport psychology within the stipulations of the MA (Counselling Psychology) degree.

2.2.4.3 Sport

All the studies on the MAC approach included athletes as participants. These athletes competed in a number of sports which included basketball (Gooding & Gardner, 2009; Hasker, 2010), springboard diving (Schwanhausser, 2009), swimming (Bernier et al., 2009), golf (Bernier et al., 2009; Hasker, 2009; Kaufman et al., 2009; Thompson et al., 2011), long distance running (De Petrillo et al., 2009; Thompson et al., 2011), volleyball and field hockey (Wolanin & Schwanhausser, 2010), and archery (Kee & Wang, 2008; Thompson et al., 2011), as well as baseball, women's lacrosse, women's soccer, track and field (Hasker, 2009), taekwondo, Malay martial arts, tenpin bowling, soccer, rugby and dragon boating (Kee & Wang, 2008).

None of the studies on MAC included equestrian sport. Equestrian sport is unique in that equestrian athletes consistently deal with and rely on a living being that has its own fears, characteristics, habits and needs (see 1.2.2).

2.2.4.4 Participants

The participants in the MAC studies ranged from recreational athletes to elite athletes in their various sports. Most studies were done using adult⁹ participants (De Petrillo et al., 2009; Gooding & Gardner, 2009; Hasker, 2009; Kaufman et al., 2009; Kee & Wang, 2008; Thompson et al., 2011; Wolanin & Schwanhausser, 2010). Only two studies included adolescent¹⁰ participants. These adolescent athlete participants consisted of a 12-year-old springboard diver (Schwanhausser, 2009), as well as seven elite golfers (Bernier et al., 2009). However, the research of Bernier et al. (2009) included two separate studies: one included adolescent golfers while the other study used adult swimmers as participants. With regard to gender, the majority of research included both male and female participants (Bernier et al., 2009; De Petrillo et al., 2009; Hasker, 2010; Kaufman et al., 2009; Kee & Wang, 2008; Thompson et al., 2011). Two studies included males only (Gooding & Gardner, 2009; Schwanhausser, 2009) and one included females only (Wolanin & Schwanhausser, 2010).

Only two studies on MAC included adolescent participants (Bernier et al., 2009; Schwanhausser, 2009). Neither of these, however, were qualitative studies. The current study focused specifically on adolescent athletes without specifying gender.

2.2.4.5 Methodology

Apart from two studies that made use of mixed methodologies (Schwanhausser, 2009; Thompson et al., 2011), all studies on the MAC approach were quantitative studies (Bernier et al., 2009; De Petrillo et al., 2009; Hasker, 2009; Gooding &

⁹ “Adult” refers to athletes over 18 years of age (Louw, Van Ede, & Louw, 1998).

¹⁰ “Adolescent” refers to athletes between the ages of 12 and 18 years. This developmental phase has its onset at the start of puberty. The adolescent phase is characterised by the search for identity as well as the onset of sexual maturity, which can lead to confusion according to the theory of Erik Erikson (1902–1980) (Louw et al., 1998; Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 2003).

Gardner, 2009; Kaufman et al., 2009; Kee & Wang, 2008; Wolanin & Schwanhausser, 2010), with none being qualitative in nature.

The current study was undertaken as a qualitative study and was thus the first qualitative study done on the MAC approach. Nevertheless, there have been attempts to encourage researchers to conduct more qualitative studies in the field of sport psychology and to make use of inquiries such as phenomenology and narrative inquiry, which focus on the subjective experience of the athlete as a viable resource of information (Dale, 1996; Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b). This research was thus done in accordance with the need for more qualitative research in the field of sport psychology and will provide a unique account of the experiences of the equestrian athletes as they relate to the MAC approach.

2.2.4.6 Findings

The following are the most prominent findings from the research on MAC: the majority of research findings include a positive correlation between mindfulness and acceptance and the concept of flow, which seems to have improved in athletes after attending a mindfulness programme. These can thus be regarded as effective components for increased performance (Bernier et al., 2009; Kee & Wang, 2008; Schwanhausser, 2009; Wolanin & Schwanhausser, 2010). Results from two studies, however, suggest that mindfulness may not be an effective component of performance development. These two studies used Mindful Sport Performance Enhancement (MSPE) to enhance mindfulness as a means of increasing performance. Both studies successfully increased mindfulness; however, this did not in turn increase performance (De Petrillo et al., 2009; Kaufman et al., 2009). A one-year follow-up study to that of De Petrillo et al. (2009) and Kaufman et al. (2009) did, however, show a significant improvement in athletic performance in relation to trait variables, suggesting that MSPE may be effective in enhancing athletic performance over a longer period of time (Thompson et al., 2011). By contrast, one study found that MAC did not improve performance and indicated that there is limited support for the applicability and utility of MAC because, when compared to PST for performance improvement, the results were insignificant (Hasker, 2010). However, the studies of

Bernier et al. (2009) and Schwanhausser (2009) support the notion that the MAC approach is suitable for use with adolescent athletes.

Existing research done on the MAC approach, as well as PST in equestrian sport, consists mainly of quantitative studies with the aim of providing statistical evidence for the effectiveness of the approaches as a means of performance development (Bernier et al., 2009; Blakeslee & Goff, 2007; De Petrillo et al., 2009; Hasker, 2009; Gooding & Gardner, 2009; Kaufman et al., 2009; Kee & Wang, 2008; Wolanin & Schwanhausser, 2010; Wolframm & Micklewright, 2011a; 2011b). Results of the above-mentioned studies were not unanimous in proving either approach's efficacy or inefficacy. Two studies indicated that PST may be effective in enhancing performance of equestrian athletes (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2011a; 2011b). This is in contrast with Gardner and Moore's (2006; 2007) critique of PST (see 2.2.2). However, the purpose of this study was not to validate or criticise either approach, but rather to focus on the experience of the participants regarding the MAC approach.

To date, no research has studied the experience of adolescent equestrians of performance development through their participation in a MAC programme. Therefore, a need for more qualitative studies seems to be warranted, especially in sports such as equestrianism for which there is no research available on the MAC approach.

2.3 MINDFULNESS-ACCEPTANCE-COMMITMENT (MAC) AS THE FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

The reasons for choosing MAC as the focus of this study are discussed below:

Firstly, the lack of research with regard to the MAC approach in equestrian sport was one of the reasons for making it the focus of this study. Although there is some literature available on PST in equestrian sport, none is available on MAC in equestrian sport. Moreover, the existing literature available on PST in equestrian sport, as well as MAC in any sport, relates mainly to quantitative studies testing the efficacy of the programmes. The current study aimed to gain an understanding of

adolescent equestrians' experiences of the MAC programme rather than to test its efficacy.

Another reason for choosing to do a study on MAC was because this study focused specifically on performance development as experienced by adolescents. The adolescent phase may possibly be an opportune time to introduce athletes to value-directed behaviour (see 2.2.3.3) as opposed to outcome-directed behaviour in sport, since this is the phase characterised by identity formation (Louw et al., 1998; Meyer, Moore, & Viljoen, 2003). Recently, an initiative called Let's Play¹¹ (Supersport, 2011) was developed to campaign for youth participation in sport in SA. By using a value-driven approach like MAC in combination with such sport development initiatives for example, one can not only identify talent and provide opportunities for potential young athletes, but one can also begin to instil the concept of value-directed behaviour in sport, as well as in everyday life.

A third reason for choosing the MAC approach as the focus of this study was the idea that, as a performance development approach, it may be particularly suited to the context of equestrian sport. Owing to the fact that this sport revolves around the handling and riding of a strong animal with its own will, the sport is one that not only requires exceptional expertise but is also one that is vulnerable to misconduct and particularly maltreatment or abuse of horses. Competitors often neglect the well-being of the horse in an attempt to achieve in the sport (McIlwraith & Rollin, 2011; McLean & McGreevy, 2010a, 2010b). A value-driven approach such as MAC may assist in emphasising the importance of the horse's well-being (as a value) as being equal to the importance of achievement in the sport among competitors.

The partnership between horse and rider is also of particular importance in equestrian sport (see 1.2.2). The impact of an acceptance-based and value-driven approach on this partnership has yet to be discovered. Accordingly, by gaining an understanding of the experience of adolescent equestrians of the MAC programme in relation to their horses, some light may be shed on the subject.

¹¹ Let's Play is a corporate social responsibility initiative developed by Supersport and partners. It was developed in response to the national need in SA for children to be more active and to develop physically as well as socially through participation in play, activity and sport.

By incorporating the use of mindfulness and acceptance, as well as focusing on commitment towards value-directed behaviour, the MAC approach does not have to be limited to use within the sport domain. Gardner and Moore (2007) argue that performance development is not just about what happens during the performance phase, but also about how the performer handles environmental demands and lives their life in general. Therefore, the focus of this study was not only on understanding how adolescent equestrians made sense of the MAC programme and how they could apply it to their sport, but also on how they could possibly apply it to other areas of their lives.

2.4 PERSONAL REFLECTION

The process of conducting a literature review on PST and MAC highlighted the following to me:

Firstly, the lack of qualitative research on both PST and MAC stood out from the literature review. This made me particularly interested in discovering more about the participants' personal interpretations of their MAC experiences. It is my view that qualitative research, such as that used in the current study, provides rich and unique information that may well be of practical use for the sport psychologist as a practitioner. As a practitioner, I place value on gaining meaningful insights into the experiences of my clients, as I can use them to shape my approach and enrich the professional relationship that I form with them.

Secondly, by doing research on MAC, I became aware of how the principles have started to infiltrate my own participation in sport, as well as my life in general. Having been participating in equestrian sport for 15 years, I started to apply MAC to my own riding and found it to be significant. This again increased my interest in the eventual experiences of the research participants. Not only did reading and learning about MAC infiltrate my horse riding, but it also became a part of my everyday life and continues to do so. To me, this substantiated the plausibility of the research questions for the current study in that they not only focus on the participants' experiences of MAC in their sport, but also on the possible transference of their experiences to other areas of their lives.

Conclusion

After reading this chapter, the reader should have a clear indication of the fundamental differences between PST and MAC as performance development approaches along with an understanding of how the approaches originated. The reader should also have a basic conception of the essence of the underlying philosophies of each approach and how they assist in developing athletic performance. The reader should also have an overview of the existing research done on these approaches. Lastly, the reader should understand the reasons for choosing MAC as the focus of this study. The next chapter will describe the research inquiry of this study, specifically referring to the research context, the participants, the research design, and the ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 3

INQUIRY

Introduction

Chapter 3 presents a description of the methodology used in this study. Specific focus will be placed on the sport context of the study, information about the participants, the research design, as well as the ethical issues that had to be considered and factors that contributed to the quality of the study.

3.1 CONTEXT

3.1.1 Sport Context

The organisational context of this study was the UP hpc. This is where the research participants were identified and where the data-generating process was conducted. The hpc is endorsed by the university's Institute for Sport Research (ISR) and is also the first of its kind in SA. The hpc offers accommodation, training facilities and training equipment, as well as professionally qualified personnel dedicated to the development of sport in SA and specifically to the athletes training at the hpc (University of Pretoria [UP], 2012c). One group of athletes training at the hpc is the TuksSport High School pupils. The TuksSport High School accommodates learners from Grades 8 to 12 (ages 14 to 18) and currently has roughly 220 pupils enrolled (University of Pretoria [UP], 2012b). The school is sport orientated and allows the learners to focus on training and improving their athletic skills in their particular sport while completing school. For the duration of 2011 I did practical work at the hpc which included psycho-educational group work with the high school athletes as well as individual counselling sessions with some of these athletes under the supervision of the resident psychologist. I also attended training sessions with some of the athletes to familiarise myself with the sport context.

3.1.2 Academic Context

This entire project was conducted within the guidelines stipulated by the Postgraduate Research and Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the UP.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

A total of four participants participated in this study. All of the participants were equestrian athletes and were part of the hpc training programme. The selection process (see 3.2.1) was overseen by the resident psychologist at the hpc, who works with the athletes on a daily basis.

3.2.1 Sampling Method

Purposive sampling was the method used to select participants for this project. This sampling method is used in qualitative research when the goal of the research justifies the researcher using his or her own judgement to select particular participants who are suitable for the study. Therefore, participants are selected because they met the stipulated criteria for the study (Babbie, 2005; Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006).

The selection of participants for this project was thus done on the basis of the knowledge of the resident psychologist at the hpc. Accordingly, athletes who met the selection criteria and were suited to the desired outcome of this project were invited to participate.

3.2.2 Sampling Criteria

The following criteria applied to all the participants selected for the study:

- Participants were athletes at the hpc.
- Participants were on a secondary school level.

- Participants were competing in equestrian sport at the time.
- Participants were actively competing on at least the provincial level.
- Participants were classified on the PD level of the MCS-SP (see 1.1.4d).

3.2.3 Research Participants

Participants were asked to participate in the research on a voluntary basis. The table below provides demographical information of the four participants. To protect the identity of the participants, their names were not used; instead a specific name-code was allocated to each participant.

Table 1: Demographic information of participants

Participant code	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Highest competitive level	Category of equestrian sport
Equestrian 1 (EQ1)	18	Male	African	International	Vaulting; show jumping
Equestrian 2 (EQ2)	17	Female	Caucasian	International	Vaulting
Equestrian 3 (EQ3)	16	Female	Caucasian	International	Dressage; showing; equitation; eventing; Western riding; show jumping
Equestrian 4 (EQ4)	16	Female	Caucasian	International	Dressage; Western riding; show jumping

3.3 DESIGN

3.3.1 Experiential Learning

The implementation design for this study was based on the principles of experiential learning. Experiential learning became popular in the USA as a method of learning in response to traditional, formal or didactic education. This movement advocated for a type of education in which the learner is an active participant in the learning process and not merely a passive receiver of information.

Experiential learning can therefore be summarised as learning by doing. The process usually involves a briefing about an activity followed by participation in the activity to create an experience and, lastly, by a debriefing/reflecting session. The experience should be structured to an extent and monitored by the facilitator/s to optimise learning. The reflection is a crucial part of the learning process as this allows for the development of new skills, attitudes and ways of thinking and the learners are encouraged to apply the newly acquired skills in the relevant setting (Gentry, 1990; Lewis & Williams, 1994; Pimentel, 1999).

The work of American organisational psychologist, David Kolb, was central to this movement and influenced the methods of teachers and trainers, specifically those working with students aged 16 years and older (Healey & Jenkins, 2000). Kolb developed a four-stage model that describes the learning cycle based on experience. The four stages are concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. The design of the current study is depicted in figure 3.1 below and is based on David Kolb's four-stage model. The four stages are referred to as experience, reflection, meaning and action. These four stages, along with how they were implemented in the research design, will be explained below.

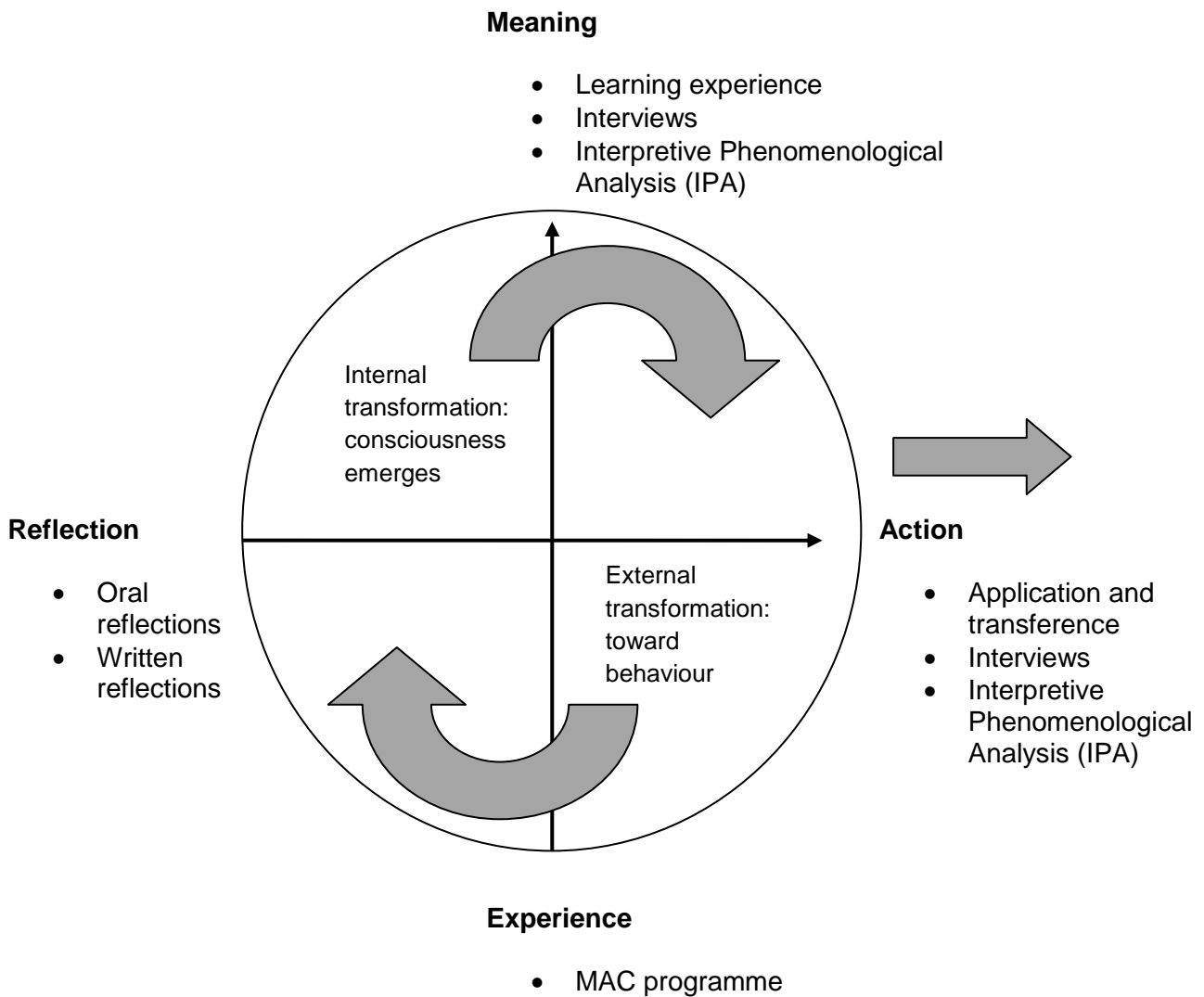


Figure 3.1 The learning wheel (adapted from Law, Ireland, & Hussain, 2007)

3.3.2. Experience

According to Law et al. (2007), learners are provided with a concrete experience when they are actively doing or participating in an event. Such an experience allows them to make sense of their encounter and creates an opportunity for them to understand the event according to their personal experience.

The MAC programme (see Appendix F) that was presented to the participants served as the *experience*. The programme is an adaptation of Gardner and Moore's MAC programme (2007). I specifically adapted the programme so that it was suitable for use with adolescents, by including suitable pictures, descriptions and activities. It was also shortened so that it could be presented over a two-day period (this was due

to time constraints, as the participants had limited time available in their schedules). And lastly, it was tailored to include experiential activities and reflection questions in order to create a learning experience. The fact that the programme was shortened could have had implications for its effectiveness. Consequently, the duration of the programme was viewed as a limitation to the study (see 8.2.1). The programme was however presented to other groups of athletes and non-athletes prior to this study (see 3.3.2.2) in order to obtain constructive feedback, and the opportunity to make final adjustments in an effort to enhance the quality of the participants' experience.

3.3.2.1 Programme Development

1. Programme Outline

The programme consisted of five modules and was presented over two days, as indicated below:

Day 1

Module 1: Introduction to the MAC approach

Module 2: Mindfulness within the MAC approach

Day 2

Module 3: Acceptance within the MAC approach

Module 4: Commitment within the MAC approach

Module 5: Integration within the MAC approach

2. Module Outline

Each module of the adapted MAC programme is divided into the following main headings: outcomes, concepts, activities and reflection.

- a. In the “outcomes” section the main objectives of the module are given; this section serves as an introduction to the content of the module.
- b. The “concepts” section contains concise definitions of the main concepts included in the module and to which the participants are introduced. The

definitions are brief and are used to assist in the generation of experience during the activities.

- c. The “activities” section of the particular module contains two activities that the participants complete. Each activity is preceded by a briefing (explanation and instructions for the activity) and followed by a debriefing (discussion during which the participants make sense of their experience).
- d. During the “reflection” the participants reflect (in a written format) on questions about what they have learnt from the module (learning reflection), as well as about how they think they can apply what they have learnt to equestrian sport and their lives in general (application reflection).

3. Programme Delivery

I presented the entire MAC programme to the four equestrians on my own.

The above-mentioned steps in and guidelines for experiential learning were adhered to during the development of the adapted MAC programme; thus the participants were actively involved in the learning process.

3.3.2.2 Programme Facilitation

1. Facilitator Training

- 2011:
- a. I was given theoretical training on the MAC approach as part of the Sport Psychology module – an elective module forming part of the MA (Counselling Psychology) degree.
 - b. I initially presented training on the MAC programme as part of a course for a group of athletes at the hpc. This training was conducted weekly over a period of six months.
- 2012:
- a. In this year, I developed the MAC programme that was used for this research project. I developed the programme specifically for use with adolescents and also made it sport-specific in terms of applying it to equestrian sport.

- b. To train myself in the presentation of the programme I first presented it to MA (Counselling Psychology) students during March 2012. I also obtained feedback from the students on my presentation skills and methods, as well as on the programme content and presentation aids (MAC workbook and Powerpoint slideshow), in the form of a questionnaire which the students completed.
- c. In June 2012, I also presented the programme to the open netball team (consisting of players between 15 and 18 years of age) at Rosina Sedibane Modiba Sport School.¹²
- d. Lastly, I presented the programme to thirteen provincial-level ice skating athletes between the ages of 11 and 15 years.

2. Facilitation Venue

The entire programme was presented in one of the suitable venues at the hpc over the designated period of two days.

3. Facilitation Resources

The resources that were used during the facilitation to make the programme more interesting and valuable to the participants included a printed version of the MAC workbook (see Appendix F) and a slideshow. The MAC workbook contains the entire adapted MAC programme and provides space for the participants to complete their reflections on each module before moving on to the next. The participants were allowed to keep their workbooks, as this would assist them during the interview process.

3.3.3 Reflection

After the initial learning event, it is advised that learners take some time to reflect back on their experience. This gives learners the opportunity to explore the learning

¹² Rosina Sedibane Modiba is a high school in Pretoria West which caters specifically for scholars showing athletic potential in various sporting codes.

that took place and specifically allows them to compare their experience to past experiences, as well as to think about future possibilities (Law et al., 2007).

During the MAC programme, after each learning experience, the participants were asked to discuss their experience (oral reflection) and later to write down their reflections (written reflection). This gave them the opportunity to think about what they had learnt, to internalise the experience and to speculate on how they might apply what they had learnt in the future.

The written protocols of each participant formed the basis of the semi-structured interviews that followed.

3.3.4. Meaning

Meaning is created when learners translate what they have experienced into a meaningful concept according to their own understanding. Law et al. (2007) refer to this as *conceptualisation*. The learners' experiences are thus linked to a model or theory, as they make sense of their encounters to create personal meaning (Law et al., 2007).

In order to discover how the participants created meaning from what they had experienced, semi-structured interviews based on each participant's written reflections were conducted. The interviews, which served as the data-gathering process, were conducted in a venue at the hpc that ensured comfort and privacy for the participants. A voice recorder was used to record the interviews as this also assisted in protecting the identity of the participants.

3.3.4.1 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

The method of analysis used to extract meaning from the interviews was interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA studies are aimed at gaining deeper meaningful and unique accounts of experience (Finlay, 2009; McPhail, 1995; Osborn, 1990; Ponterotto, 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). In this particular study, the aim of the interviews was to obtain a detailed account of

how the participants conceptualised what they had learnt through their experience of the MAC programme, as well as how they anticipated applying it in their sport as well as in other areas of their lives.

3.3.4.2. Guidelines for an Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) Interview

The following guidelines for an IPA interview (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2008) were taken into consideration while conducting the interviews:

- IPA interviews usually last an hour or longer and can become intense (depending on the topic of discussion). It is therefore advisable to interview participants individually (if possible) and avoid interruptions. In this study each of the four interviews were done individually without interruption and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.
- Participants may feel more at home in a familiar setting where they are comfortable. This should be taken into account when deciding on an interview venue. For this study the venue used was easily accessible to the participants and was familiar to them since the venue was at the hpc.
- The interviewer should spend some time at the beginning of the interview putting the interviewee at ease and setting the tone for the interview, before substantive questions are introduced. This is to ensure comfort and encourage openness in the interviewee. This was taken into consideration during the interviews.
- The role of the interviewer is to facilitate and guide rather than to direct or dictate. The aim of an IPA interview is to enter the social and psychological world of the respondent; therefore he/she is viewed as the experiential expert on the subject in question and should be given maximum freedom to tell their own story. During the interviews care was taken to follow the lead of the interviewee and not to divert him or her away from their own personal meaning-creating process.
- The interview schedule is used only as a guideline and not a prescriptive rule. Respondents often share issues that the interviewer had not thought of and therefore should be allowed to play an active role in determining the direction

that the interview takes. During the interviews the schedule was used as a guideline and the structure of the interviews remained flexible throughout.

- The interviewer should try and get in-depth responses from the interviewee with the least amount of prompting or guiding. A good strategy is therefore to start with general questions and only use further specific prompts if the interviewee does not understand the question or gives a short superficial reply. In the interviews, closed-ended questions and leading questions were kept to a minimum. Care was taken to give the participants freedom to speak without interfering or prompting unnecessarily.
- The interviewer should monitor the effect of the interview on the respondent by being sensitive to their body language. The interviewer can ask questions differently or at different times during the interview if needed. Each interview with each respondent was therefore distinct in terms of the questions asked.
- The interviewer should be aware of his/her ethical limitations when doing the interview; an IPA interview is not a therapy session and the interviewer must take precautions to remain in the role of interviewer (researcher) rather than therapist, especially when sensitive subjects are being discussed. The content of the interviews for this study was not of a sensitive nature, although when participants did mention personal past experiences, care was taken to remain in the role of researcher rather than to engage in a therapeutic style of interaction.

3.3.5. Action

The fourth phase of the experiential learning cycle involves planning and the implementation of the newly acquired knowledge and skills. Taking their experience, reflections on the experience and personal meanings concerning the theory into account, the learners can now embark on using what they have learnt in relevant situations (Healey & Jenkins, 2007; Law et al., 2007).

This study was aimed at discovering what the participants learnt through their experience of the MAC programme, as well as, in particular, to see how the equestrians anticipate using their acquired knowledge in their sport, as well as in

other areas of their lives (application and transference). The *action* phase, as with the *meaning* phase, was therefore also studied by applying IPA, which will be discussed in more detail below.

3.3.5.1 Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) Methodology

The methodology of IPA is a qualitative process which will be described under the following six sub-headings (Finlay, 2009; McPhail, 1995; Osborne, 1990; Ponterotto, 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Starks & Brown-Trinidad, 2007; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007):

1. **Question:** The question asked from an IPA perspective is narrow and specific in terms of context. This is because the researcher aims to obtain unique and contextually rich accounts of participants' experiences of the phenomena in question.
2. **Literature:** A literature study is done prior to the start of the project. The researcher uses prior knowledge in a subjective and reflexive process of data gathering and analysis. Knowledge about the phenomenon enhances the researcher's understanding and it is recognised that the researcher plays an active part in the cogeneration of meaning derived from the experiences being studied.
3. **Purpose:** The purpose of IPA would be to understand and explore diverse and unique meanings in relation to a specific phenomenon, as indicated by participants' experiences of the phenomenon.
4. **Material:** Methods for data gathering mainly include semi-structured interviews, textual accounts and dialogue. The researcher is aware of his or her biases throughout the process and reflects on how these may influence the construction of meaning.
5. **Analysis:** In IPA the analysis is also a process of engaging with the text to discover themes and clusters of themes. However, with this approach the researcher plays an active role in constructing meaning by taking his or her biases into account. The researcher also engages with the text in such a way as to discover the

deeper meaning of the dialogue and to make meaningful interpretations of the participants experience within his or her “situatedness” (historical cultural context).

6. Outcome: The aim of this type of inquiry is to gain knowledge of the participants’ interpretations regarding the phenomenon in question through the subjective interpretations of the researcher. The outcome of this process is interpretations that go beyond the data and that uncover and reveal the concealed meanings of the phenomenon through the participants’ experiences.

3.3.5.2 Transcriptions

In order to analyse the data and understand how the participants engaged in the meaning and action phases of the experiential learning cycle, the data obtained during the interviews were firstly transcribed.

According to Oliver, Serovich, and Mason (2005), transcribing is a crucial part of the analysing process and can affect the representation of the data. The researcher must decide whether to involve a transcriptionist or whether to transcribe the data himself/herself. Involving a transcriptionist may have advantages in terms of time constraints, but it also introduces the possibility of errors as the transcriptionist may be distanced from the data and unfamiliar with the context and specific context-related terms (MacLean, Meyer, & Estable, 2004; Tilley & Powick, 2002). Taking this into consideration, I decided to complete the transcribing process myself as I am familiar with the context and the relevant terms and also conducted the interviews, thus being familiar with the participants. This ensured the trustworthiness of the data, confidentiality and familiarity with the text, which assisted in the analyses. Easton, McComish, and Greenberg (2000) state that the ideal is for the researcher to be both interviewer and transcriptionist.

3.3.5.3 Analysis

After transcription was complete, the analysis was conducted according to the IPA guidelines as described below (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Terre Blanche et al., 2006):

- a. Familiarise: Reading and rereading the transcriptions as well as making notes with the aim of becoming immersed in the text.
- b. Induce: Revising the notes and studying them to discover emerging themes.
- c. Connect: Listing emergent themes and identifying connections. This allows for themes to be organised into clusters, each cluster consisting of subordinate themes.
- d. Elaborate: Reorganising and exploring themes more closely. Themes that do not fit well in the emerging structure or lack evidence are left out.
- e. Cases: The process of analysis is then repeated for all participants. The aim is to recognise ways in which the participants' accounts are different as well as similar to add to the richness of the interpretations.
- f. Writing: Once the process was completed for all participants, the themes that were obtained were translated into a narrative account.

3.3.6 Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) as the Research Position

As stated in chapter 2, counselling psychology and more specifically sport psychology have been dominated by positivist/quantitative research (see 2.2.4.5). There is, therefore, a need for more qualitative studies within sport psychology (Dale, 1996; Smith & Sparkes, 2009a, 2009b). Among the available research conducted on the MAC approach, only one study made use of mixed methods, while the other studies were all quantitative projects. Being a qualitative study, this project is thus the first of its kind among research done on MAC and will therefore address the need for more studies of its kind in sport psychology. IPA is just one approach to conducting a phenomenological study within the broader philosophy of interpretive phenomenology (Finlay, 2009; Giorgi, 1992; McPhail, 1995).

The aim of an IPA study is to gain subjective information about people's interpretations of their experiences of a phenomenon and thereby look for unique experiences that will add valuable insights to knowledge about the phenomenon that

is being researched (Finlay, 2009; Giorgi, 1992; Lavery, 2003; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

IPA was thus chosen as the research position for this study as the aim was to gain deeper meaning on the way adolescent equestrians experience the MAC approach. Using IPA gives detailed, personal accounts of lived experience. It highlights individual interpretations and gives the reader an in-depth account of what it is like to experience the MAC approach as an adolescent equestrian. Wojnar and Swanson (2007) substantiate this by stating that IPA is particularly suitable for the researcher who appreciates ambiguity, embraces differences and looks for uniqueness, while generating meaning and understanding of contextual features of lived experience.

As the researcher aims to gain unique insights into the inner world of participants' subjective experiences of a particular phenomenon, the epistemology of an IPA study is subjective. The philosophy guiding the approach is that there are multiple realities and that our realities are embedded within our culture, history and social context, therefore each individual will have a different interpretation of their experience. Just as the participants' interpretations are embedded within their culture, history and social context, so are the interpretations of the researcher of the knowledge that is gained. The researcher therefore includes his or her biases in the research process and should be aware of how they might influence the study – hence, the subjective and reflexive epistemology (Finlay, 2009; Giorgi, 1992, 2005, 2007; Lavery, 2003; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

As a result of the subjective and reflexive nature of an IPA study, as mentioned above, personal reflections on the unfolding of this study were included in most of the chapters.

3.3.7 Experiential Learning as the Design

The value of experiential learning lies in the aspect of participation. Participation facilitates a deeper and more personalised understanding with a longer lasting impact, as opposed to merely hearing or seeing information in a didactic manner (Gentry, 1990; Lewis & Williams, 1994; Pimentel, 1999). The process of experiential

learning was particularly suitable for this study, as the participants were all high school learners and were thus exposed to didactic or “passive” learning on a daily basis. The principles of experiential learning used to implement this study were therefore different from what the participants were used to at school, which consequently created a distinct experience for each of the participants. A second reason why experiential learning was suitable for this study was because it is an IPA study with the aim of studying “experience”. Thirdly, seeing that the participants are also all athletes who live active lifestyles, experiential learning was indicative of an effective design as it is different from what they experience daily at school, but familiar in terms of actively participating in activities (as they would in sport).

3.4 PERMISSION AND QUALITY

3.4.1 Faculty Permission

The research project was conducted after permission had been granted from the Postgraduate Research and Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the UP.

3.4.2 Organisational Permission

Prior to the start of the study, permission was obtained from the hpc for the research to be conducted on the premises (see Appendix A).

3.4.3 Research Quality

3.4.3.1 Journal

The act of journaling is in accordance with IPA, as it allows the researcher to become more aware of his or her own experiences and the influence he or she has on the research process. As mentioned above (see 3.3.6), in an IPA study the researcher is aware of his or her biases and brings these influences into the process. Journaling is one way of bringing the researcher’s biases to the fore and including them in the findings (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

3.4.3.2 Supervision

Throughout the entire research process, regular supervision sessions were conducted with my research supervisor (Prof. L. Human). These sessions, which were held once every two weeks, contributed to the quality of the research.

3.5 ETHICS

3.5.1 Privacy

3.5.1.1 Anonymity

None of the participants' names will be revealed to the public in this thesis or in the peer-reviewed journal article that will be written on the findings of this project. In order to protect their identity participants are referred to in this thesis by code names. This was intended to respect the participants' right to remain anonymous and was explained to them in the research information document they were given prior to the start of the project.

3.5.1.2 Right to Disclosure

During the interview I did not pressurise any of the participants to disclose any information they did not wish to. It was completely up to them to decide what they were prepared to disclose and what they would prefer to keep private; therefore the participants' right to disclosure was respected. This was also explained to participants in the research information document they were given (O'Donohue & Ferguson, 2003; Thomas & Hersen, 2011).

3.5.1.3 Right to Confidentiality

Information that participants chose to reveal during the interviews was not discussed with any other party and therefore remained between me (the researcher) and the participant. The participants' right to confidentiality was therefore respected. If information obtained from the interviews was discussed during supervision sessions,

the identities of the participants were protected using code names, as was also done in this thesis (O'Donohue & Ferguson, 2003; Thomas & Hersen, 2011).

3.5.2 Informed Consent

As most of the participants were all still under the age of 18 years during the time of their participation in the project, they were considered legally underage and the consent of their parents or legal guardian was needed in order for them to act as participants in the study. Therefore, the parents/legal guardian of each participant was required to sign a consent form before the athlete could be included in the study (O'Donohue & Ferguson, 2003; Thomas & Hersen, 2011) (see Appendix B).

3.5.3 Informed Assent

Despite the fact that underage participants cannot give legal consent to participate in a study, they are still required to assent to their participation. Therefore, each participant signed an assent form stating that they were participating voluntarily in the study and that they understood what the process entailed (O'Donohue & Ferguson, 2003; Thomas & Hersen, 2011) (see Appendix C).

3.5.4 Dual Roles

The ethical aspect of dual roles was considered during this project as I had to play two different roles during the process, the one being the role of researcher and the other being that of facilitator. These two roles were not portrayed as separate from one another, but rather as interacting with one another: during the presentation of the MAC programme, the role of facilitator was in the foreground (and the researcher in the background) while during the interviews the role of the researcher was in the foreground (and the facilitator in the background). To avoid misconceptions and potential confusion on the part of the participants, this dual role was stated and explained clearly in both the consent letter and the assent letter (see Appendix B and C). I was also transparent throughout the process: as with IPA, the researcher is seen as a subjective part of the research being done and who works in close proximity with the participants (Finlay, 2009; Giorgi, 1992, 2005, 2007; Laverly,

2003; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). In order to minimise any possible role confusion I might experience as both facilitator and researcher, peer review groups were attended and supervision sessions were held on a regular basis (Chew-Graham, May, & Perry, 2002; Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

3.5.5 Support

Owing to the use of open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews, qualitative research may at times cause distress or discomfort among participants. This is particularly true when the interviews are of a therapeutic nature or if the interview covers a sensitive subject. During this project participants were exposed to a psycho-educational process as opposed to a therapeutic process, which therefore eliminated any perceived risk to participants with regard to emotional distress. However, support services were made available at the hpc by the resident psychologist (see Appendix D) in the event that a participant should wish to discuss what they have learnt through their experience of the study (Chew-Graham et al., 2002; Orb et al., 2001; Richards & Schwartz, 2002; Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

3.5.6 Storage

The material pertaining to this research project will be stored at the UP for a period of 15 years for archival purposes.

3.6 PERSONAL REFLECTION

In reflecting on the research process, I could identify themes that stood out for me from my own personal experience. These themes were investment, concern, enlightenment and endorsement.

1. *Investment.* During the process of conducting this study, I was particularly aware of my own personal investment in the study. On an academic level, this study contributed to my obtaining an MA degree in Counselling Psychology and therefore had personal importance. As a practitioner, this study taught me the value of experiential learning principles, how to conduct an IPA interview, as

well as how to work with and relate to adolescent athletes on an interactive basis. This also strengthened my personal investment. And lastly, as an equestrian athlete, conducting this study again had personal value in that I could apply what I learnt both theoretically and experientially to my own practice of horse riding.

2. *Concern:* The theme of concern became eminent throughout the interview stage of the study. It was firstly a challenge to adhere to the guidelines of an IPA interview (see 3.3.4.2), while at the same time being aware of my own investment in the study, previous knowledge of MAC, as well as personal experiences with MAC and equestrian sport. This reminded me of the practitioner context where, as a psychologist, it is pivotal to have a high level of self-awareness while at the same time practising a person-centred approach towards the client. I reflected on how my own personal experiences and previous knowledge might affect me in the practitioner context. Another concern during the interview stage was whether the participants' accounts provided meaningful data to be studied. This concern stemmed from the fact that limited theory was presented during the programme and the fact that the programme lasted only two days.
3. *Enlightenment:* This theme became apparent during the transcribing and analysing stages and also refuted my concerns as mentioned above. I found it enlightening to discover meaning in the data and to organise the data into themes. As a researcher one cannot remain unchanged by the process and this part of the process had particular meaning for me in that I found the discovery of meaning rewarding and fulfilling. As an equestrian athlete, I also learnt from the experiences and meaning creation of the participants. Their responses made me reflect on my own commitment to the values that relate to both my horse and my sport.
4. *Endorsement:* The fourth theme that emerged strongly from my experience of the research process was the theme of endorsement. Whereas initially I was uncertain about whether MAC was in fact applicable to equestrian sport, after completing this study I was convinced of its applicability. The findings of this

study highlighted for me the fact that a value-driven approach such as MAC is particularly suited to use within the context of equestrian sport where an animal is involved, as animals are vulnerable to the actions of humans. After completing this study, I believe that I can confidently endorse the application of MAC in an equestrian sport context.

On the basis of the above discussion, the subjective nature of an IPA study was important to me throughout this process. I realised that, as the researcher, I was subjectively involved in the study on various levels and would not have been able to remain objective.

Conclusion

After having read chapter 3, the reader should have a good understanding of the methodological details of the study. The reader should understand the sport context from which the participants were chosen and should be aware of the relevant information about the chosen participants. An overview of the MAC programme used for the study was also given in order to familiarise the reader with the details of the programme, how it was compiled and presented and how the data for the study were captured. Chapter 4 will present the findings obtained from the interview with EQ1.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

(EQUESTRIAN 1)

Introduction

EQ1 was an 18-year-old African male who had been competing in vaulting and show jumping for 12 years. He had represented South Africa in an international competition in 2010 and was planning do so again in 2014.

4.1 MINDFULNESS

4.1.1 Learning

Through his participation in the MAC programme EQ1 learnt experientially about mindfulness. His learning entailed: (1) formulating his understanding of the concept mindfulness; and (2) the implications of using mindfulness.

1. *Understanding mindfulness.* Firstly, for EQ1 mindfulness meant being more focused and aware of what was happening internally as well as externally. He stated that mindfulness is “*to be aware of what is happening to me, inside and around me ... I learnt to be aware of my environment around me*”. Secondly, he learnt that mindfulness means to direct his focus at the task he was currently busy with. He stated that “*I must focus on what I’m doing at the moment so that I can do it right then and concentrate on what I am doing ... not to think about maybe like the weekend or what I’m going to do after training*”. This reflects *mindful attention*, as described in chapter 2 (see 2.2.3.1).
2. *Implications of mindfulness.* Firstly, EQ1 learnt experientially that using mindfulness was challenging. He stated that at first “*it was a bit of a challenge, because like I was not used to it*”. Secondly, he mentioned that external distractions emanating from the environment in particular made it difficult to remain focused, stating that “*I was focused and I was aware of other people,*

other people's dices, like, when they fall on the table, I was getting a bit of distraction and it was bit of challenging for me". Lastly, EQ1 noted that using mindfulness could be helpful in improving his focus as he had already started to apply it prior to the interview, saying that *"it did like really help me a lot because I was focused and I did trust in the horse"*.

4.1.2 Application

In applying mindfulness to equestrian sport, EQ1 spoke about being (1) aware of himself, as well as his horse (dual awareness). EQ1 also became aware that applying mindfulness assisted in (2) enhancing his concentration while performing. Through his experiential learning of mindfulness he realised that applying it to his sport had (3) certain benefits.

1. *Dual awareness.* EQ1 anticipated that, while he was busy with vaulting, he could apply mindfulness to become aware of himself as well as the horse, particularly the movement of the horse, stating *"to keep my focus on what I am doing ... and think of the movements, the movement of the horse and be concentrating on the horse of what it's doing"*. He also mentioned that he could use it to become aware of potential distractions for the horse's sake, as well as his own, saying *"to be aware ... of what might happened and, and expect that everything around you might distract you or the horse"*. This is an example of *mindful awareness* (see 2.2.3.1); however, EQ1 focuses his mindful awareness on external stimuli rather than bodily sensations and internal experiences.
2. *Mindfulness and concentration.* EQ1 mentioned that he could apply mindfulness to concentrate on important aspects while performing; one such aspect being *"to concentrate on the horse and my [his] routine, like what I'm [he's] doing so that I [he] must not forget the next move"*. Another important aspect to concentrate on was his balance. He indicated that he should *"concentrate and think of the next move that you're [he is] supposed to do and be balanced on the horse and try not to fall off"*. He also mentioned that by applying mindfulness to enhance his concentration, he would be less likely to

be distracted by external stimuli. He stated that mindfulness would help him “*to not get distracted and not, like, look at other people, like spectators*”.

EQ1 did, however, recognise that in certain situations it might prove to be more difficult to apply mindfulness, which would affect his concentration. He explained: “*When I’m training and thinking of tomorrow’s test, that might be difficult to me, like, to be mindful, because I’ll be thinking of tomorrow’s test and not being concentrating on what I’m doing*”.

3. *Benefits of mindfulness.* EQ1 noted that applying mindfulness could be beneficial to him in his sport, saying, “*it will, like, help you to be more focused and be more committed on my sport and to be trustworthy of the horse and your coach*”.

4.1.3 Transference

In transferring the application of mindfulness to other areas, EQ1 anticipated that he could use it (1) in a general sense to enhance his awareness and focus, but also particularly in (2) relationships and interactions with other people.

1. *In general.* EQ1 felt that he should apply mindfulness in a general sense to improve awareness, saying, “*just in life, I’m, I must be aware of what I’m doing and around me*”. He explained that he had already started to transfer mindfulness to his life in general prior to our interview, stating, “*in each and every thing I’m doing, like I’m referring to mindfulness, like to be focused on what I’m doing, not get distracted*”.
2. *Relationships/interactions.* EQ1 noted that he could apply mindfulness in his relationship with his mother to remain aware of how he should respond to her and interact with her by saying that “*[he is] supposed, like, to listen to her as my [his] mother ... to respect her*”. He also anticipated that he could use mindfulness to become aware of the influence that people or friends might have on him, as indicated by the following statement: “*to be aware of, of like which*”.

people or friends am I meeting ... are they, like good example to me or bad example to me”.

4.2 ACCEPTANCE

4.2.1 Learning

Through his participation in the MAC programme, EQ1 learnt experientially about acceptance by (1) formulating his own understanding of the concept and (2) distinguishing between accepting and reacting, which seemed to be a prominent theme.

1. *Understanding acceptance.* During the activities, EQ1 learnt that, for him, acceptance was about accepting emotions. He indicated this by explaining, “*I didn’t like react to it [frustration], I just, like kept calm and tried again and tried again until I get it [the activity] right*”. By experiencing the activities, he also learnt that he could accept discomfort or distractions while busy with a task and not let them interfere with what he was doing, saying, “*to accept in whatever I am doing and deal with it later, not while I am still busy with the task or activity*”.
2. *Accepting versus reacting.* EQ1 indicated that by using acceptance he could remain calm in a frustrating situation by stating the following:

They [the dice] would keep on, like falling off, so I just had to accept it that I can’t, like I’m not a good person to, like put things straight and not being shaky, so I didn’t, like react to it , like in a bad way. I just like, I just keep quiet and did accept it that I can’t do it.

He realised that if he had reacted to his frustration he might have behaved in an undesirable way, stating, “*if I didn’t accept ... I was going to react on it ... like putting the table upside down, like um being aggressive*”. He noted that he might even have directed his emotions at other people, for instance “*taking your [his] anger out in other peoples ... and maybe like fighting with people*”. This is an illustrative example of the difference between acceptance and avoidance

(see 2.2.3.2). EQ1 is here reflecting on his willingness to experience internal discomfort instead of avoiding it by acting on his frustrations. Acting on his frustrations may result in momentary relief but would not allow for long-term benefits.

EQ1 also learnt that there are uncontrollable factors in life and sport and that he should accept them rather than react to them in a negative way, by commenting, *“maybe like I break my ankle – just have to accept it that I’m broken ... I must not react to it in, like a bad way”*.

4.2.2 Application

With regard to applying acceptance to equestrian sport, EQ1 anticipated that he could use it to (1) deal with horses in general (dual acceptance). He also indicated that he could apply it to his conduct towards the horse, specifically to have (2) patience, as this inadvertently plays an important role in the horse’s behavioural response. Thirdly, the (3) relationship between horse and rider was also a theme that stood out from EQ1’s account of how he could apply acceptance in his sport.

1. *Dual acceptance*. Because a horse is an animal, its behaviour is inconsistent and at times unpredictable according to EQ1. He indicated this by saying that *“a horse is not, like every time in a good mood – sometimes they become naughty, they become moody, not like listen to you and stuff like that”*. This has an impact on him and may cause discomfort. He explained that sometimes he *“get[s] frustrated because I’m [he is] supposed to prepare for this big competition and this horse doesn’t want to work with me [him]”*. He indicated that he could use acceptance to deal with this factor in his sport, that is, not to get upset with a horse when it behaves in an undesirable manner, stating, *“accepting the horse when it’s, when it is in a bad mood ... and do not want to work with me on that day”*.
2. *Patience*. EQ1 mentioned how, despite sometimes struggling with a horse, one has to take care to treat it with kindness and that some horses in particular

require a lot of patience. He anticipated that he could apply acceptance to treat horses with patience by stating:

... being patient with the horse and accepting that it's not the best horse maybe in a riding school or a very well-schooled horse, just have to accept it that still that horse is still learning so you must have patience towards it.

It also stood out from our interview that what the athlete does has an effect on how the horse behaves and, if the horse is treated kindly and with patience, it has a positive effect on the horse's behaviour. EQ1 illustrated this by saying that "*horses, like, when you go easy with them, like maybe, like not hitting them hard ... the next lesson or sessions, um, they become easy with you and they listen to you sometimes*". On the other hand, if the horse is treated unkindly and impatiently, the behaviour might worsen. He indicated this by stating the following:

While you're doing that you're making the horse worse- it's not going to listen to you anymore ... because it's going to remember you that the last lesson or training you smacked him hard or you whipped him with the whip and you kicked him ... so not going to be nice to you also.

EQ1 therefore inferred that he could apply acceptance by being patient towards horses and not taking his frustration out on them.

3. *Relationship.* EQ1 illustrated how the relationship between horse and rider is an important aspect in equestrian sport, particularly trust. He said that "*you stand up on top of a horse doing back flips or cartwheels ... so you must trust your horse and your horse must trust you*". He also suggested that his behaviour influences the relationship with his horse, saying, "*when you go and fetch it, calling its name, it's going to realise your voice that this guy, he was like being cheeky with me and it's going to be scared of you*". Therefore, acceptance can be applied in behaviour that would enhance the relationship between horse and rider. He explained this by saying:

As an athlete acceptance is more, it's much more important, because dealing with animals you're supposed to be patient and you must have, like time with them, like caring for them, stuff like that, being easy with them so that they can get used to you also and be nice to you.

EQ1's reflections on applying acceptance in his sport correlate with the theory surrounding the importance of the relationship and communication between horse and rider (see 1.2.2).

4.2.3 Transference

Through his experience of acceptance, EQ1 mainly anticipated transferring the application of acceptance to deal with unfortunate situations that are beyond his control in (1) his family as well as (2) in his romantic relationships.

1. *Family.* EQ1 stated that acceptance can be applied in the unfortunate event of sickness or death in his family. He mentioned that he should use it to accept his feelings rather than react to them in an undesirable manner, saying, "*don't stress about it or react about it, like me being moody to other[s] ... or fighting with people, you just have to accept it that his time came that he's supposed to pass on*". He gave an example from his own life where he had to accept that his father had passed away and that, despite being sad, he had to continue with his endeavours in life. He stated that "*towards myself it was sore and I couldn't like focus in school, but I did like tell myself that I just have to accept it because I need to move on*".
2. *Romantic relationships.* EQ1 described another scenario where he could apply acceptance, namely, if he were to break up with his girlfriend. He mentioned that in such a situation, he should "*accept it that you [he] got dumped. Don't react on it, just sleep ... don't start go to other people and fight with them*". He noted that a lack of acceptance (reacting to emotion) in such a case could lead to unwanted behaviour. For example, he might possibly "*be like angry, aggressive towards other people, talk to them in a bad way, like swearing at them, not being in a good mood for like two weeks or three weeks*".

4.3 COMMITMENT

4.3.1 Learning

Through his experience of the MAC programme, EQ1 learnt experientially about (1) his own understanding of commitment, as well as (2) the personal values that are important to him.

1. *Understanding commitment.* EQ1 understood the concept of commitment as being dutiful, saying, “*to be committed in what you’re doing, for example ... to this psychology session, I did put my commitment, I did come [come]*”. As well as having self-discipline, stating, “*I am committed to my sport so I went to training alone ... I did practise by myself without anyone, without my coach being there*”. In his understanding of commitment, EQ1 combined the MAC meaning of the term, which is more complex, with the literal meaning, which to him equates with being “disciplined”.
2. *Personal values.* EQ1 learnt about his own personal values which he regarded as important when he participated in the activities. The values that stood out for him were firstly self-belief, saying, “*I did use commitment by like believing in myself that I’m going to do the activity*”. Secondly, he identified the values of honesty and trust, stating, “*to trust myself and be honest towards myself ... I did trust myself that ... I’ll be the leader in the group*”. Thirdly, the value of self-discipline, saying, “*that time I couldn’t like win the task, I did discipline myself that I’m not going to react on that bad emotion*”. Lastly, he also noted trustworthiness in the eyes of others as an important personal value, by saying, “*I am trustworthy towards other people, I do like, um, say my word and I do react on what I said*”.

4.3.2 Application

What stood out from EQ1’s account of how he anticipated applying commitment to his sport was, firstly, that his commitment would remind him of (1) the values he regards as important as an equestrian athlete. Secondly, he illustrated how he could

apply them (2) during competitions. He also said that he would use commitment to (3) set an example for others and, lastly, he indicated that applying commitment would have (4) certain benefits and had in fact already had a positive effect on him in his sport.

1. *Values as an equestrian athlete.* It was important to EQ1 to be focused on intrinsic rewards rather than extrinsic rewards as a value. He indicated this by saying, “*not just doing my sport for money – to get money and be famous ... just [to] enjoy my sport and doing what I love*”. He also regarded trust between him and the horse as an important value, stating, “*to trust my horse – that it is, it is going to do the right thing and I’m also going to do the right thing*”. Lastly, he stated that having self-discipline and being dedicated to training is important to him as an athlete, saying, “*when other people they cannot go to training, I am like going to training ... even though there’s no one to go to training or like going to teach me, I’m still like going to training, sticking to my values*”.
2. *Trust during competitions.* EQ1 explained the importance of remaining committed to his value of trust during a competition, stating that “*especially in a competition, I need to trust my horse and the horse needs to trust me ... because in a competition it’s where like everyone is looking at you, like because they judging on what you doing*”. He did indicate, however, that when dealing with horses they may behave in a way that might make it difficult for him to remain committed to his values. He explained this by saying, “*for SA Champs last December ... my horse was a bit, um, ... he was naughty, he was bucking around, so by the time I was supposed to go into the arena, um, I was not trusting him anymore*”.
3. *Setting an example.* EQ1 would like to use commitment to create awareness of equestrian sport (specifically vaulting) in the townships and in the community where he trains. He illustrated this by saying the following:

Especially kids in the townships does see me doing this kind of a sport, so that they can get, also like, um, interested in horse riding and doing

vaulting. Saturdays I train in Soweto so people come in ... and see what ... horse riding is all about – what is vaulting is about.

By creating awareness and setting an example, he wanted to encourage children to become involved in sport, which in turn would keep them from engaging in destructive and/or criminal behaviour. He explained, “*by being in the sporting ... committee [community] it’s like stopping them from doing bad things ... like going robbing people in the streets, drinking ... doing crime*”. EQ1 also wanted to use commitment to his values to set an example of how to treat animals (horses specifically), especially in townships where, according to him, “*they abuse the horses*”. He explained that he “*want[s] to show them that horses are not ... supposed to be treated in that way. They’re supposed to be, um, cared [for] and loved*”.

4. *Benefits of commitment.* EQ1 mentioned that applying commitment to specific values has had a positive effect on his performance, stating, “*it does help a lot, because when my coach, um, coaches me the next time, he can see the differences um, towards [compared to] the previous training*”. EQ1 also stated that applying commitment to his sport had changed his life in a positive way in that he was no longer involved in crime. He expressed this by stating the following:

I was a bad person, like I was hanging around with people that are very bad, like doing house-breaking, hi-jacking, stuff like that. So my mom spoke to me about that behaviour and told me I must be [involved] in sport and in schoolwork ... Then I did try that and it did work for me. I was involved in um, sport, in a sporting environment then I didn’t have time to hang out with those guys again ... I was committed to sport and my school work as well.

EQ1’s example given here again illustrates a more literal and perhaps generic interpretation of the term *commitment*.

It also helped him to remain motivated and increased his chances of reaching his goal in the end. He stated, “*when I get um, in my room and I’m lazy to go to train ... I open my cupboard and I see that person’s picture [professional vaulter], that motivates me and I stick to my values that might lead to my goals*”.

4.3.3 Transference

After learning experientially about commitment, EQ1 felt that he could apply commitment to his values (specifically his value of being trustworthy), to (1) his relationships, and to (2) school. He also felt that applying commitment to (3) life in general could be helpful.

1. *Relationships*. EQ1 indicated that it was important to him to be committed to the value of trustworthiness within his family, saying, “*in my family like they supposed to trust me as their kid ... to my mom as her son ... like for example when they send me to the shop, I must go to the shop*”. Also in his friendships, he explained that, “*my friends must trust me in what I’m doing, for example if one of my friends says I must keep her phone for two days, he[she] must be able to trust me ... I’m not going to steal it*”.
2. *School*. EQ1 indicated that he could apply commitment to his values of being trustworthy and dutiful at school, with the following comment:

At school ... the teacher must like um, believe in you or trust you ... maybe the teacher says, uh, she’s going to be there for extra class tomorrow morning at 7 o’clock ... she must trust in you and believe in you that you going to pitch.

3. *Life in general*. EQ1 found commitment helpful for reaching his goals in sport, but also viewed it as something important in all aspects of his life, stating, “*it did like, help me a lot to be committed ... it’s something that’s guiding you throughout your goals and to your future ... it plays a very big role in your life*”.

4.4 PERSONAL REFLECTION

I experienced EQ1 as soft-spoken, polite and modest. What stood out for me the most from our interview was firstly his emphasis on treating horses with kindness and respect. EQ1's demeanour in general reflected that of a kind and respectful person. I can only speculate that these characteristics may be transferred to the manner in which he deals with horses. A second aspect that stood out was that EQ1 interpreted *commitment* in literal terms as being a value in itself. He seemed to combine the abstract notion of commitment in the MAC sense of *being committed to values* and commitment in the literal sense of being dedicated and dutiful. This confusion may stem from the fact that little theory was presented during the programme and also from the ambiguity in the use of the term *commitment*, seeing that commitment may actually be seen as a value in itself. This caused me to reflect on the ambiguous question: can an athlete commit to the value of being committed?

Although EQ1 conveyed some understanding of the MAC concepts during our interview and also gave unique examples of lived experiences where he had applied or could possibly apply the concepts, his reflections were somewhat limited in terms of depth and understanding. As with mindfulness, EQ1 reflected mainly on being aware of external distractions while participating in his sport and did not reflect on being aware of internal experiences. This may be due to (1) the nature of equestrian sport where there are many external factors that could possibly have an effect on the horse, thereby highlighting the importance of external awareness. It could also be that (2) the limited theory and limited time-span of the programme did not allow for an in-depth understanding or for reflection to occur. Lastly, it may be that (3) EQ1's reflections and understanding of the concepts may have been influenced by the fact that English is not his home language and therefore he might not have been able to express himself optimally.

EQ1's ambition to be a role model and create awareness in townships regarding the treatment of animals also stood out for me. It emphasised for me the fact that his context and upbringing differed to a great extent from that of the other participants. I found this particularly interesting and valuable in terms of contributing to the findings of this study, as it illustrated the multicultural diversity of the South African context.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings derived from the interview with EQ1. It specifically explored the way in which EQ1 experientially made sense of mindfulness, acceptance and commitment with regard to the learning that took place, its possible application to his sport, as well as its transference to other areas of his life. Chapter 5 will focus specifically on the findings in relation to EQ2.

CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS

(EQUESTRIAN 2)

Introduction

EQ2 was a 17-year-old Caucasian female. She had competed in equestrian sport in the field of vaulting for three years. Before she had started vaulting, she had competed in gymnastics. She had national colours for vaulting and had won an international competition.

5.1 MINDFULNESS

5.1.1 Learning

By participating in the MAC programme and learning experientially about mindfulness, EQ2 firstly (1) gained self-awareness and, secondly, formulated (2) her own understanding of what mindfulness meant to her.

1. *Self-awareness.* Through her experience of mindfulness, EQ2 learnt more about herself as a person. She realised, for instance, that her imagination could cause her to become distracted if she did not have clear instructions to follow. This was evident from the following statement, “*I have a very active imagination so if I don’t get asked to do something then my mind would wander off*”. She also realised that she preferred getting clear instructions that would allow her to plan ahead and be organised, stating, “*clear instructions and then also, as I said, structure. I’m very, in a way, a neat freak sometimes*”. By being mindful she had realised that her preference for structure could at times be excessive and that she should not always want to plan ahead, saying, “*It just made me more aware of how it can actually be a negative thing, because I know that um, you sometimes just have to listen and just do what the teacher says, the coach says and then just let it be*”.

In terms of being mindful during the activities, EQ2 found it pleasurable and realised that she didn't have difficulty in applying it. She stated, "*I didn't find it challenging or anything, I found it nice to do, it was fun*".

2. *Understanding mindfulness.* EQ2 learnt that according to her own understanding, mindfulness means to be simultaneously aware of the task that you are focused on and your environment, saying, "*a person can be um busy with one task yet knowing everything, or sensing everything around him and not being distracted*". She noted, however, that it might take a certain level of skill or willpower to apply it effectively, stating, "*if you [are] strong enough to be able to do that [apply mindfulness]*".

5.1.2 Application

Through her experience of mindfulness, EQ2 anticipated that applying mindfulness could help her to (1) enhance her awareness while performing. She also explained that she would not only be using it to become aware of herself, but also to become (2) aware of her horse and how it might react in a specific situation (dual awareness). EQ2 did, however, raise (3) a concern with regard to applying mindfulness to her sport.

1. *Enhanced awareness.* EQ2 explained that horses can at times act in an unpredictable manner, saying, "*my horse decided to freak, um bolted, well it just ran in one circle and then um as he did that I fell on my back*". She explained that by being more mindful of her surroundings, she could possibly prepare herself for the way her horse might react and respond accordingly, stating, "*if I was more aware of the kids running ... I could have made that into a move [patted the horse] and just like, as the kids ran past I could have just calmed him down*".

EQ2 stated that even before knowing about mindfulness, she had been applying it in the sense that she had always been very aware of her environment without losing focus, saying, "*without even knowing that there is such a thing ... I always usually am aware of my surroundings*"; however, she

felt that she could now enhance her awareness even further. She explained, “*I think it’s just going to make me more aware of what I’m doing, now that I know what it means actually*”. EQ2 seemed to apply mindful awareness (see 2.2.3.1) mainly to external stimuli and not to internal experiences.

2. *Dual awareness*. Being aware of the horse and what it is doing is important, according to EQ2, to avoid mishaps. She explained this by saying, “*I’ve had quite a few falls because I wasn’t aware of the horse, I was still new to it [vaulting]*”. She also mentioned that she had to be aware for the horse’s sake of what it might be feeling, as well as the surroundings, in order to anticipate how it might react. She noted that she “*must learn to become more aware of what the horse feels and what’s around me [her] to be able to, um, anticipate what’s going to happen next*”.

She indicated that she also had to be aware of what the horse was experiencing physiologically to know whether it was in pain or unwell in which case the horse could not be used to perform, saying, “*so it’s important to be aware of what the horse is feeling, because if they hurt then you can’t do anything on them*”. Being aware of the horse helped to form a connection with it, which is essential to the sport according to EQ2, since she performs dangerous acrobatic movements on its back. She stated, “*you have to have a lot of trust with him or her, because I mean you doing crazy stuff on the horse’s back*”.

3. *Concern*. EQ2 raised one concern with regard to applying mindfulness. She considered that being overly aware might increase anxiety and even cause distraction. She explained this by saying, “*if I think too much or open my mind to much about stuff then I start um, over analysing and then I start stressing and then it could just ruin the day*”. This was an interesting observation from EQ2, showing some scepticism about mindful awareness. She was not convinced that having a heightened sense of awareness is necessarily beneficial.

5.1.3 Transference

EQ2 anticipated that she could apply mindfulness in (1) her life in general, as well as at (2) school.

1. *Life in general.* According to EQ2 she could transfer the application of mindfulness to her life in general to “*become aware of the smaller as well as the bigger things in life. To establish what is more important at that particular moment*”. She also mentioned that mindfulness is a part of everyday life and therefore can be used on a continuous basis. She illustrated this by saying that “*you deal with it every single day, somehow it’s always around you, doing mindfulness, being mindful*”.
2. *School.* EQ2 anticipated that she could apply mindfulness at school to become aware of her feelings and still remain focused on the task required of her, stating, “*I’ll be aware of my boredom and the teacher talking, but then I’ll also just, I’ll listen to the teacher and maybe make notes of what she’s saying instead of doodling in my book*”. Here EQ2 did refer to mindful awareness of an internal experience, namely, boredom, showing that she could apply it to external stimuli as well as internal experiences.

5.2 ACCEPTANCE

5.2.1 Learning

Through her experience of acceptance during the activities, EQ2 gained (1) self-insight and learnt about her own attributes and capabilities. She also learnt that she was (2) capable of applying acceptance.

1. *Self-insight.* During the activities, by applying acceptance, EQ2 learnt that she was patient, although not overtly so. She stated, “*I have patience, I just don’t always show it*”. She also learnt that she “*like[s] to be challenged*” and that she could control herself in a stressful situation by being “*calm when something unexpected happens*”. Lastly, she realised that despite having numerous

thoughts, she could temporarily put them aside and attend to them later, saying, “*also I have a lot of things on my mind, but I can put them away, accept that they’re there and then maybe deal with them later*”.

2. *Capable of applying acceptance.* EQ2 learnt that she was capable of accepting physical discomfort. She explained, “*when we did the activity, my back was sore and my foot was sore and I accepted that but still carried on with the thing [activity] at hand*”. She also realised that she was able to accept distracting thoughts, stating, “*if I have a debate in my own head then I’ll accept it and just carry on with what it is I’m supposed to do*”.

By experiencing that she was able to apply acceptance when participating in the activities, she realised that she “*didn’t use it [acceptance] as much as I [she] should*” and therefore that she should use it more often in her life in general, as she believed that she could benefit from it.

5.2.2 Application

Through her experience of the MAC programme, EQ2 anticipated that applying acceptance to her equestrian sport would have (and has already had) (1) certain benefits. What stood out from our interview was that she could not only apply acceptance to her own discomfort, but also to the discomfort that her horse might be experiencing. This is referred to as (2) dual acceptance. She also spoke about the effect that the (3) presence of a horse had on her.

1. *Benefits.* EQ2 stated that she was already applying acceptance and that it was helpful in the sense that she could remain calm in unexpected situations. By applying acceptance she could be “*calm when the horse decides to freak*”. Another benefit of acceptance, according to EQ2, is that it helped her not to react by taking her emotions out on the horse, saying, “*I don’t freak out or get angry and do something to the horse*”. She recognised that her behaviour affected the way her horse behaved, stating, “*I get irritated but I won’t show it, because then he will or she [the horse] will just carry on being irritating*”. She could therefore apply acceptance when experiencing unpleasant emotions, but

still act in a thoughtful manner that would not affect the horse negatively. She illustrated this by giving an example of when her horse was uncooperative in a competition, stating, “*I didn’t act aggressively ... all I did was, um, sit on the horse, calmed him down and then I um, asked the lunge to please stop ... and then just scratched*”. This application of acceptance correlates with the theory, suggesting that the mood and behaviour of the rider will influence the horse’s response (see 1.2.2).

2. *Dual acceptance*. EQ2 explained that since horses are living beings they also experience discomfort, saying, “*every one of us have our off days, even horses*”. Therefore she could use acceptance not only to accept her own discomfort, but also that of her horse, “*I accepted that we were both tired*”. Applying acceptance allowed her to feel compassion towards the horse’s discomfort and react accordingly. She stated, “*in a way I could feel what he felt because I also have an injury so I could accept being angry won’t help*”.
3. *Presence of the horse*. EQ2 noted that acceptance is easier to apply in equestrian sport than in gymnastics (which she competed in previously) due to the effect that the presence of the horse had on her, saying, “*I think having an animal there calms you down in a way*”. She explained that being around horses had an effect on her mood, stating, “*If I’ve been away from a horse for two weeks then I start getting depressed*”.

5.2.3 Transference

EQ2 indicated that she could transfer the application of acceptance to her (1) general behaviour and interactions, to (2) her relationships, as well as (3) school.

1. *General behaviour*. EQ2 mentioned that she sometimes “*tend[s] to be a bit aggressive*” and that she could use acceptance to help her deal with frustration, saying, “*I won’t let small things irritate me. I’ll be aware of them, accept that they’re there and just carry on*”. She also recognised that using acceptance in her life could possibly improve her general well-being and style of interacting. She explained by saying, “*now I know I can actually use it in life more to be*

able to ... help myself being happier and also making others around me happier". EQ2 mentioned that she found acceptance to be the most helpful of the three concepts in MAC, specifically with regard to other areas besides sport. She said that acceptance *"helped me [her] a lot more, not as an equestrian athlete, more in life"*.

2. *Relationships*. EQ2 had transferred the application of acceptance to her relationship with her mother. Where she previously reacted to her emotions, she now applies acceptance to steer clear of conflict. She explained it by saying the following, *"I can usually lose my temper and then just, we both scream and shout at each other ... nowadays, because of learning this ... I just keep on answering her questions ... I'd accept that I'm irritated, but I'd still answer her"*. She realised that reacting consistently to her emotions may be detrimental to some of her relationships, stating, *"if I react on it every single time then I would probably have been kicked out the house by now ... or not have any friends"*, therefore using acceptance may be particularly beneficial to her.
3. *School*. EQ2 anticipated that she could also apply acceptance at school, particularly during exam time, which is a stressful time of the year, saying, *"when it's examination time ... everyone is nervous ... so I think you just learn there to accept that you know the work, don't let other people distract you and then accept that you're also stressed"*.

5.3 COMMITMENT

5.3.1 Learning

Through her experience of commitment during the MAC programme, EQ2 (1) had formulated her own understanding of the concept, (2) gained insight into her own level of commitment and (3) learnt more about her personal values in terms of her sport.

1. *Understanding commitment.* For EQ2, commitment meant that one could continue pursuing your goal despite experiencing setbacks or distractions. She explained, “*not giving up on the task that you’re given to do, or your goal that you set for yourself ... no matter what distractions or events happen that you can’t control or you can control*”. EQ2 here was referring to commitment in a generic sense and not as it is defined in MAC, which is to act according to values despite discomfort (see 2.2.3.3).
2. *Level of commitment.* By participating in the activities, EQ2 learnt that she had a high level of commitment. She stated, “*I can commit myself to a task that is given to me ... and will try my best to achieve the best I can through staying committed*”. She also learnt that she could act on her values and not let her emotions determine her actions, saying, “*I can stay committed and act on what I’m supposed to do by not letting emotions interfere in my goals that I set*”.
3. *Personal values.* EQ2 learnt about her own personal values which she regarded as important in her sport. The first was respect for the horse, as it is a potentially dangerous animal. She explained, “*I have respect for the horse ... if they decide to kill you they can actually, so I respect their space and if they’re in a bad mood then I respect their mood*”. She also mentioned other values that are important to her. She noted that “*determination is a big one and then hard work*”.

5.3.2 Application

In our discussion about the application of commitment to equestrian sport, EQ2 mentioned that (1) a lack of commitment may have negative consequences. She anticipated that using commitment could be (2) helpful, but did indicate that it could be (3) challenging to always remain fully committed.

1. *Lack of commitment.* EQ2 explained that, in vaulting, a lack of commitment to your values can have serious negative consequences as it is a dangerous sport, saying, “*if you don’t stay committed to your values on the day of the event or during practice you can actually, you can hurt yourself badly*”. She

specifically referred to values in relation to the horse, such as respect, stating, *“if I don’t respect the ... horse’s feelings or the horse’s space then I could obviously get stepped on or get bucked off”*. She also mentioned that her actions would influence the behaviour of the horse, therefore her commitment to act on her values rather than emotions become important, saying, *“if I’m irritated then he would obviously feel it then he’d be irritated”*. A lack of commitment to her values on her part would consequently have a negative effect on her and the horse’s performance. She stated that if she lacked commitment *“the horse would probably like not do what it’s supposed to because I [she] didn’t work hard enough with it”*.

2. *Benefits*. EQ2 gave an example of staying committed to her values and her goals to illustrate how commitment could be beneficial, especially when she experienced a setback. She mentioned, *“when I fell, the first thing I did was get up and then immediately got back on the horse ... that was staying committed to my goal that I made that day”*. She explained that *“staying committed will help me [her] to get to my [her] goals”*.
3. *Challenging*. EQ2 mentioned that at times it was difficult to remain committed and suggested that it is unrealistic to expect to be 100% committed all of the time, saying, *“I’m not perfect so I don’t always stick to my values and stay committed to them. I do get distracted or lazy sometimes”*. She has found that having repetitive injuries has decreased her commitment. She stated that she had *“been demotivated and it’s hard to commit myself [herself] again”*. She found it very frustrating to try and remain committed in the face of setbacks, stating, *“I was always so committed to doing my sport to the fullest. Now it’s just the carry-on injury thing ... I struggle to get committed and that irritates me”*.

5.3.3 Transference

By learning experientially about commitment, EQ2 was of the opinion that she could transfer the application of commitment to (1) her life in general, (2) to school, as well as (3) dealing with injuries and the frustration that accompanies them.

1. *Life in general.* EQ2 anticipated that, firstly, she could apply commitment in her life in general to complete the tasks that are required of her. She stated, “*I have a tendency to be lazy or bored even though I have got a lot of stuff to do, but I think by setting the right values ... I can apply that in life*”. She also mentioned that she “*can apply it [commitment] at home- time management*” since she had a tendency to delay tasks, saying, “*I tend to procrastinate ... I have to have a plan to work towards*”. Therefore commitment could help her in “*staying committed to that plan*”.
2. *School.* EQ2 anticipated that applying commitment to her studies could help her to attain the goals that she had set for herself in school, stating the following, “*If I stay committed to studying, um, and studying properly, then I would achieve that mark that I set for myself*”.
3. *Dealing with injuries.* EQ2 explained that she could use commitment to help her overcome injuries and the frustration that accompanies them, saying, “*right now I’m struggling through injuries that keeps on leaping out ... through staying or sticking to my dreams ... through committing myself to them then I can move on*”. She felt that the value of perseverance could help her attain her goals in the end, stating, “*persevere through the ... irritation of not being able to do what you want to do ... stay committed to your ultimate goal in the end*”.

5.4 PERSONAL REFLECTION

EQ2 struck me as slightly reserved and also somewhat sceptical about MAC during the programme. She raised a valid concern during our interview, that increasing awareness through mindfulness might result in over-thinking or over-analysing, which could lead to feelings of anxiety. This was a unique viewpoint in relation to the other participants. Despite her initial scepticism, EQ2 did later display an appreciation of MAC through her experience of it, particularly in her life in general and not just her sport. EQ2’s initial scepticism may have originated from prior unpleasant experiences of sport psychology programmes while still competing in gymnastics, as communicated to me by her mother when consenting to her participation in this study.

EQ2, like EQ1, also confused the abstract meaning of commitment (as defined in MAC) with the generic meaning of the term *commitment* in her reflections and applications. This confusion may, again, stem from the fact that little theory was presented during the programme and also from the ambiguity in the use of the term *commitment*, because commitment may actually be seen as a value in itself.

Conclusion

Chapter 5 contained the findings from the interview conducted with EQ2. It specifically explored the way in which EQ2 made sense experientially of mindfulness, acceptance and commitment with regard to the learning that took place, its possible application to her sport, as well as its transference to other areas of her life. The following chapter will present the findings pertaining to EQ3.

CHAPTER 6 FINDINGS

(EQUESTRIAN 3)

Introduction

EQ3 was a 16-year-old Caucasian female. She had been competing in equestrian sport for nine years in the following disciplines: dressage, showing, equitation, show jumping, eventing and Western riding. She had national colours for show jumping.

6.1 MINDFULNESS

6.1.1 Learning

By participating in the MAC programme, EQ3 learnt experientially about mindfulness. She formed (1) her own understanding of the concept, and (2) learnt that mindfulness influences concentration. She also learnt (3) that it is a skill and that one's ability to apply mindfulness may be affected by particular factors.

1. *Understanding mindfulness.* To EQ3 mindfulness meant to be aware of distractions, yet to be focused simultaneously on the task at hand. She stated, “*we had to like listen to the sounds ... and sometimes it distracts you and you really had to focus on what you were doing*”. From her experience she also understood that being mindful means to be in the present, saying, “*Being mindful now, not yesterday and thinking about what happened then and what's going to happen tomorrow*”. Being mindful also includes “*being mindful of everything inside you and outside of you*”, therefore being aware of internal experiences as well as external stimuli. EQ3 reflected an accurate understanding of mindful awareness, as well as mindful attention, as described in chapter 2 (see 2.2.3.1).
2. *Concentration.* EQ3 learnt that mindfulness helped her to bring her concentration back to the task at hand in the event of a distraction. She stated,

“I learned that I can focus on my task at hand, get a distraction and almost automatically focus back onto my task again, barely noticing that I lost my concentration for a second”. She also realised that it is important to remain focused, because losing concentration (especially in a competition) may have undesirable consequences, saying, *“sometimes that little split second distraction is all you need to lead you into destruction ... you struggle too long and you knock the jump or something like that”*.

3. *Mindfulness as a skill*. EQ3 realised that she had previously applied mindfulness without realising it, not just in sport, but in general, stating, *“I learned that I have always actually been using mindfulness in everything I do”*. She had been introduced to mindfulness prior to participating in this programme, *“in Grade 8 we also did the MAC programme ... so I remembered a little bit of it”*. She explained that she had developed her skill of being mindful, saying, *“I evolved it [mindfulness]... if you go deeper into it you can learn it and you can use it better in more ways”*. Since she had been using mindfulness for a while, she found it easy to apply during the activities, stating, *“I used it beforehand so it was really easy actually”*. EQ3 deemed that certain factors might impact on her ability to apply the skill of being mindful. She explained that *“if you have a bad emotional state at the present moment ... especially when you’re like in a competition or, and there’s lots of stress on you ... then you lose focus in everything that you do”*.

6.1.2 Application

EQ3 explained how mindfulness is applicable to equestrian sport, specifically (1) during competitions. She also indicated that she could use it to become more aware of the way (2) her own behaviour influences her horse’s behaviour. Lastly, she also found applying mindfulness (3) beneficial.

1. *Mindfulness in competitions*. EQ3 explained how she could apply mindfulness in unpleasant situations at competitions, like in the warm-up arena to acknowledge distractions and discomfort, but remain unaffected. This is an example of non-judgemental awareness. She stated the following, *“that’s the*

worst, when people bump into you and they are like nasty to you ... and then you just let it go in and let it go out ... you don't let your focus get lost or get frustrated". She also mentioned that she could apply mindfulness to obtain a broad awareness of many things, yet focus specifically on her task during a competition, stating, "*you must be aware of all your surroundings and everything within you and outside in order to focus truly on your task*". This reflection again illustrates EQ3's comprehensive understanding of mindfulness as well as her ability to apply it.

2. *Own behaviour affects horse behaviour.* EQ3 indicated that applying mindfulness assists her to regulate her behaviour since it will have an impact on how her horse behaves. She explained this using a scenario in which she was angry at another rider for smacking her horse during their warm-up. She explained, "*so I was mad and I was like, 'okay keep calm don't let it affect anything', because if I lose my temper my horse is going to do it as well*". She indicated that horses react differently in different situations and may be prone to taking fright, particularly the more sensitive ones, saying, "*especially if you have a skittish and a very freakish horse*". She therefore felt that she could apply mindfulness to become aware of her horse's behaviour and to act calmly in unexpected situations so as to not make the horse more upset, thereby avoiding mishaps. She stated the following:

When you get distracted, especially with horse riding it may just take a turn for the worst ... like if there was a bird flying by and your horse freaks out ... the horse may kick another horse behind him or you may fall off ... So you just keep calm and try to correct what your horse did wrong before anything bad happens.

In the above quote, the importance of mindful awareness regarding external stimuli in equestrian sport is illustrated, as experienced by EQ3.

3. *Benefits.* EQ3 noted that mindfulness could be beneficial, especially in horse riding, because it helps one to become aware of potential external distractions, saying, "*if you use mindfulness it would really help you*

because it helps with the surroundings ... because it's really distracting, especially if you're in a big arena and everyone's watching you". She also indicated that it would help her to become aware of internal discomfort, without affecting her performance, stating, *"and all the stress, be aware of the stress but not let it influence what you are doing now in the arena"*.

6.1.3 Transference

Through her experience of mindfulness, EQ3 anticipated that she could transfer the application of mindfulness to (1) her life in general, to (2) school, as well as to (3) her interactions with other people.

1. *Life in general.* EQ3 had already applied mindfulness in her life and explained that she could use it in any situation in which she experiences discomfort so that she can still complete important tasks. She explained, *"when you feel down, have a headache or just have problems in your life at the moment ... be aware of your problem but do not let it influence your performance or your task at hand"*. She believed that applying mindfulness in life is beneficial and therefore that *"you should be practising that [being mindful] because it can really help you"*; however, she did recognise that it can be difficult at times, saying, *"when you have lots of distractions it may be very hard for you, but it is possible with lots of dedication and concentration"*.
2. *School.* EQ3 used mindfulness to remain focused on her schoolwork and exams while her grandmother was very ill; therefore she used mindfulness to remain focused on her task while experiencing discomfort. She illustrated this by saying, *"I had to focus on doing the test and then writing the answers and thinking about the answers and not my grandmother all the time"*. She also indicated that in her experience being mindful automatically leads to acceptance. She used the same scenario to indicate this, *"so you just had to accept the pain ... all the bad feelings and the sadness and focus on your test"*. To EQ3 the concepts of MAC overflow into each other, saying, *"when you do the one [mindfulness] you kind of, the other one [acceptance] just comes along with it. You can't do the one separately from the other one"*. In transferring the

application of mindfulness to other areas, EQ3 again displayed a higher level of understanding. It was evident that she had become more proficient in using mindfulness over time.

3. *Interactions with people.* EQ3 also mentioned that one could use mindfulness to deal with hurtful emotions caused by interactions with people, stating, “*if other people are like nasty with you ... you’re mindful of them ... but you just ... you don’t really let them influence you anyhow*”.

6.2 ACCEPTANCE

6.2.1 Learning

By participating in the MAC programme, EQ3 learnt experientially about (1) her own understanding of acceptance and was also able to distinguish between (2) accepting discomfort and reacting to discomfort. She learnt about (3) her own ability to apply acceptance and how it related to her horse’s discomfort as well.

1. *Understanding acceptance.* By experiencing acceptance, EQ3 understood that she could accept difficulties in her life and therefore not react to the emotions that it caused. She explained, “*I learnt to accept whatever obstacles comes in my way and just accept that they are there, not reacting by getting angry*”. By experiencing acceptance she also realised that certain factors were out of her control, stating, “*you just accept it because you can’t change it*”.
2. *Acceptance versus reaction.* EQ3 distinguished between accepting emotions as opposed to reacting to emotion. With regard to accepting emotions, she said the following, “*your feelings especially ‘cause like you may get angry ... so then you just accept that angeriness*”. To illustrate how reacting to emotions would differ from accepting them, she used the following example, “*you may get very frustrated and start breaking your whip or some other expensive tack ... take your anger out ... on your surroundings and you may yell at other people*”. She learnt that she could accept her emotions for the sake of not letting them interfere with the task at hand, saying, “*you don’t let it influence your*

performance... you still try to work over that angriness and focus... and concentrate on your task". EQ3 found acceptance to be beneficial as opposed to reacting to emotions that might have undesirable consequences, especially in competitions, saying, *"I find it [acceptance] very useful 'cause ... if you react in a bad way it's going to influence your performance"*.

3. *Applying acceptance.* Lastly, EQ3 learnt that she was able to apply acceptance during the activities that they did and did not find it difficult to do. She indicated that she had managed to accept her discomfort by saying the following, *"I lost my focus a little bit ... my jaw got a little stiff because I was biting the stick too hard ... but then I just accepted it and I kept going on"*.

6.2.2 Application

In discussing the application of acceptance through EQ3's experience of it, the themes that came to light were (1) dual acceptance and the (2) influence of the rider's behaviour on that of the horse. It also became apparent from what EQ3 said that horses differ in their behaviour and that acceptance would be particularly (3) applicable to "difficult" horses. Finally, she spoke about (4) acceptance as a skill.

1. *Dual acceptance.* According to EQ3, acceptance is particularly applicable in equestrian sport since the athlete is dealing with his/her own discomfort as well as that of the horse. She stated, *"now you're on the horse ... you take your own feelings into account and what the horse is doing"*. Since horses are animals, their behaviour is at times unpredictable or undesirable, therefore acceptance can be of particular use in certain situations, as mentioned by EQ3 in saying, *"accepting everything that your horse does ... like if your horse freaks out for some weird reason you have to accept that it just freaked out, because you can't go back in time and quickly change it"*. For EQ3, equestrian sport can be compared to a team sport where team members take each other into account; acceptance could therefore be applied to take the horse and its experiences into account along with the athlete's. She explained that in a team sport *"you also have to work with the other players and when a player gets hurt you have to take them into account and it's the same with horses"*. EQ3 explained that in

horse riding you also have to accept what the horse is experiencing, even when it causes discomfort for the rider, saying “*Like when your horse is sick ... obviously you get disappointed at your horse but it’s not really his fault ... so you accept the obstacle ... wait till your horse is better and then you start again*”.

2. *Rider behaviour affects horse behaviour.* EQ3 illustrated how riding a horse can at times cause unpleasant emotions if one struggles with the horse. She felt that she could apply acceptance in such instances to stay calm, stating, “*when my first reaction would normally then be to take out all my frustration and anger on my horse, I would now just accept the situation ... let it pass by me without affecting me*”. She realised that if she reacted to the discomfort in a destructive way, it would probably worsen the horse’s behaviour, saying, “*if I react to the situation, the situation would most probably just get worse ... She [the horse] gets worse when you smack her*”. EQ3 applied acceptance to act kindly towards her horse, in order to improve the horse’s willingness to execute tasks. She indicated this by saying the following, “*I really try to keep calm and accept that she’s not gonna do it [the movements] right if I get nasty to her. So I just try to be nice to her so she can be nice to me*”. She applied acceptance to deal with emotions in such a way that won’t influence her horse and the task, stating, “*you accept all that emotions, everything, scream quickly in your head and come back and then you’re fine again*”. These reflections of EQ3 correlate with the theoretical definition of acceptance in that she was willing to experience temporary discomfort for the purpose of longer-term gain. She was therefore applying acceptance as opposed to avoidance (see 2.2.3.2).
3. *Acceptance and “difficult” horses.* EQ3 indicated how different horses behave differently and that some are more difficult to work with, saying, “*I have a very difficult horse ... she just cracks me*” and that “*my [her] other two horses are easy peasy*”. She found that acceptance was particularly applicable in dealing with a difficult horse, because it helped her to accept the internal discomfort she felt, stating, “*I just accept the whole situation and she being naughty and me being frustrated and all the emotions in me and then I just let it sort of run out of*

me". She was of the opinion that using acceptance had improved their partnership and their execution of tasks:

It's really working with her ... instead of she getting upset and then half an hour we try to do that move over and over and over again ... we just do it ... so it's really helped us to do it, the things right and do it quicker.

4. *Acceptance as a skill.* EQ3 found it difficult to apply acceptance when working with her horse when she heard about it for the first time prior to doing this programme, saying, "*the first time it was really hard ... I started shaking like this and I just had to calm myself the whole time*". However, as with mindfulness, she found that she could improve on her skill in applying it, stating, "*it gets better the more I do it*".

6.2.3 Transference

After her experience of acceptance, EQ3 postulated that she could use it at (1) school, as well as in her (2) life in general.

1. *School.* According to EQ3 acceptance is useful for handling stress when writing tests, saying, "*when I am really stressed for a test but I know that I did study hard, I will just accept the situation and be focused on writing the test and staying calm*". She felt that it could help her to remain focused when faced with distractions, stating, "*so you really had to try to sort of get that out of your mind or place it at the back of your mind and shift all your knowledge and your test ... to the front of your mind so you can focus*". Reacting to emotions in a negative way can have undesirable consequences. EQ3 mentioned that in her experience "*when you react badly you're most probably going to fail your test*".
2. *Life in general.* EQ3 was already transferring the use of acceptance to her life in general in order to help her continue with everyday tasks despite emotional discomfort, saying, "*when something emotionally happened in my life I would just let it be and focus on the other things that I have to do*". She gave the example of when her grandmother passed away, stating, "*we just accepted the*

whole situation and all our feelings ... and then we went on". She used acceptance in general to avoid becoming upset in frustrating situations, stating, "*you just accept the anger that you feel and the person coughing or sneezing... and you try to focus*".

6.3 COMMITMENT

6.3.1 Learning

Through her experience of commitment when participating in the MAC programme, EQ3 formulated (1) her own understanding of the concept. She also learnt about (2) the values that she regards as important, as well as (3) the implications of having commitment.

1. *Understanding commitment.* For EQ3 commitment meant to be goal-directed and focused on what she wanted to achieve. She stated, "*if you put your mind on something you have to push through and do it ... if you commit to it then you must do it*". She also saw commitment as a driving force that helped her to keep working towards her goals even when faced with obstacles along the way, stating, "*it drives me a lot 'cause I commit to many things in life ... there may be obstacles or whatever then I just go over the obstacles*". Commitment therefore helped her to stay determined to reach her goal, which she indicated by saying, "*[to] commit myself to this journey and never give up until I reach that commitment, that goal*". In these comments, EQ3 is referring to commitment in a general sense and not to the term as it is defined in MAC.
2. *Personal values.* EQ3 learnt experientially about her own values that she adheres to in her performance life, the first being focus. She mentioned, "*I think focus is my thing ... on doing what I have to do now and trying the best, trying my best ... and keeping my goal in mind while I'm doing it*". She also recognised perseverance as one of her values, saying, "*and then my perseverance, I've always tried to never, ever give up on anything that I set my mind to*". Lastly, she identified dedication as a personal value, stating, "*I'm*

really dedicated to my sport. My horse riding is my one thing in my life that I won't ever let go".

3. *Implications of commitment.* EQ3 surmised that commitment has a motivating effect and being motivated, in turn, reinforces commitment, stating, "*if you don't really commit to it then you won't be motivated to do it, and not motivated to commit. You won't do it*". Therefore she felt that a lack of commitment would have negative consequences in that it might stop someone from reaching their goal. She explained, "*you're going to be motivationless, um, so you won't have that perseverance to reach your goal ... you'll give up half way*". This is contradictory to the theory on MAC, suggesting that commitment and motivation are opposing concepts (see 2.2.3.3). For EQ3, as she illustrated above, the concepts of commitment and motivation supplement each other.

6.3.2 Application

For EQ3 applying commitment was mostly about (1) acting on her values as opposed to reacting to her emotions.

1. *Values versus emotions.* EQ3 mentioned that she could apply commitment by letting her values be the driving force behind what she wanted to achieve and not her emotions, saying, "*I would not let my emotions drive me. I would let my commitment to my values drive me*". She explained that accepting an emotion allows her to act on her values in constructively, rather than reacting in a destructive manner, stating, "*so then you react in a bad way, you maybe yell at the person ... but when you accept it you sort of still react but in a good way*". EQ3 stated that she used the unpleasant emotions that she may have felt in a particular situation to drive her commitment to her values. She explained, "*I let that emotion, like, I get sort of frustrated with them because they keep telling me I can't do this ... and I tell myself I can do this. I commit to it that I'm going to do it better now*". In doing so, she channelled her unpleasant emotions in a positive way, in accordance with her values, which would enhance her performance rather than distract her from her task:

When that person, she smacked my horse ... so I told myself 'okay if we have the same dressage class I just want to prove to her that I can actually ride a horse' and so I just ... committed myself and took that frustration there for hitting my horse and my anger and everything and I tried to work harder on getting my horse round and letting her lengthen more her steps.

In the above section, EQ3 illustrated her grasp of the term *commitment* as defined in MAC. She was able to convey that she used commitment to endure some short-term discomfort and still act in accordance with her values (rather than emotions) for the sake of long-term gain (see 2.2.3.3).

6.3.3 Transference

By participating experientially in the MAC programme, EQ3 felt that she could transfer the application of commitment to (1) her life in general and (2) school, as well as in (3) her relationships. She finally also commented on the (4) benefits of commitment and MAC as a whole.

1. *Life in general.* For EQ3 commitment was applicable every day when acting in accordance with her values in everything that she did. She stated in this regard, *"I would keep all my personal values in mind while I do everything every day. I would try and remember my values that I set for myself before I react"*. She indicated that she used commitment to overcome obstacles in her life and remain determined, saying, *"I pushed through everything and focused. I was focused"*.
2. *School.* EQ3 explained that she used commitment to remain focused on her school work; to do well irrespective of the discomfort that she felt when her grandmother was ill, stating, *"my grandma got sick ... and then I needed to commit myself to studying ... and keeping my values of studying hard and doing well in school"*. She mentioned that her behaviour would have been different had she not been committed to her values in that situation, saying, *"maybe then I would do it half-heartedly ... so all my marks would go down and I wouldn't have studied as much"*.

3. *Relationships*. When starting at a new school, EQ3 felt discomfort because she was not naturally inclined to make friends; however, she mentioned that she applied commitment to her values to engage with other learners, stating, “*I’m really bad at making friends in general. So I had to commit to making new friends and at least learning to know the people*”.
4. *Benefits*. EQ3 explained that the MAC concepts are effective as a whole, saying, “*It’s like a package, you can’t take it apart ... It has to work as a team*”. She indicated that, in her experience, mindfulness as acceptance becomes redundant if commitment is not applied in the end, stating, “*everything of the mindfulness and the acceptance ... it would be a waste because you messed it up if you didn’t commit*”. EQ3 experienced the programme as beneficial in sport, as well as in the other parts of her life, saying, “*this programme really helped a lot, not just in sport but everywhere*”.

6.4 PERSONAL REFLECTION

My experience of EQ3 during both the programme and the interview was that she was calm, collected and insightful. What stood out for me the most about our interview was that EQ3 had a particularly in-depth understanding of MAC as a whole, as well as each of the concepts as separate entities. She reiterated that the concepts flow into each other and work together as a package and also explained with comprehensive illustration how she had been able to apply MAC to her sport and to life in general. EQ3’s thorough understanding of MAC is possibly due to the fact that she had prior exposure to the approach when she was in Grade 8 (3 years prior to this study). EQ3 also explained that her skill in applying MAC had progressed with time, which was an interesting and valuable account.

Conclusion

Chapter 6 described the findings in relation to EQ3. In particular, the way in which EQ3 made sense experientially of mindfulness, acceptance and commitment with regard to the learning that took place, its possible application to her sport, as well as

its transference to other areas of her life. The next chapter will present the findings obtained from the interview with EQ4.

CHAPTER 7 FINDINGS

(EQUESTRIAN 4)

Introduction

EQ4 was a 16-year-old Caucasian female. She started riding when she was only three years old. At the time of this study, she had competed in show jumping, dressage and Western riding, and had attained national colours for equestrian sport.

7.1 MINDFULNESS

7.1.1 Learning

Through her experience of mindfulness in the MAC programme, EQ4 learnt that she was able to apply mindfulness during the activities and that it mainly affected her (1) awareness of her surroundings. She also realised that she had been (2) using the skill of mindfulness before learning about it in this programme.

1. *Awareness.* Through her participation in the activities, EQ4 indicated that being mindful enhanced her awareness of external stimuli, saying, “*I have realised that I am more aware of the sounds and activities around me*”. She found mindfulness to have a calming effect, stating, “*It made me relax*” and also that while enhancing her external awareness, it allowed her to be task-focused at the same time. She explained, “*I am able to bring my concentration back to what I’m doing at the moment and that I don’t really have any distractions on my mind*”. This is an example of mindful attention (see 2.2.3.1).
2. *Prior application.* EQ4 realised that prior to knowing about MAC, she had used mindfulness in her sport to become aware of and focus on her tasks, stating, “*I realise that I actually was using it before I even know, have known about mindfulness and this whole MAC programme*”.

7.1.2 Application

For EQ4 applying mindfulness mostly entailed (1) being more aware of external distractions while she was competing or even just training, while also (2) focusing on particular aspects of importance while executing the task. She also explained how applying mindfulness would (3) influence her behaviour and concentration, which in turn would have an effect on her horse.

1. *Awareness of external Distractions.* EQ4 mentioned that she would use mindfulness to be aware of her environment to identify potential distractions, stating, “*I would be more aware of what is happening around me*” as well as what her horse might be aware of, saying, “*and what my horse is seeing and hearing*”. She would be aware of external distractions such as “*all the people cheering at me [her]*” as well as “*a lot of people riding with me [her]*”, yet not focus on them and rather focus on what is important in the moment. She explained, “*I would block out the people cheering me on and what’s happening around the arena and only be focused on what I’m supposed to be doing at the moment*”. EQ4 focused here on mindful awareness, but only mentioned awareness of external stimuli and not internal experiences. She was trying to convey how she could use mindful awareness and mindful attention to focus on her task; however, the words “block out” could be seen as a form of avoidance and may link to a PST approach, rather than MAC principles (see 2.2.2).
2. *Focused attention.* EQ4 explained that in applying mindfulness she would be able to channel her attention and focus specifically on the important factors around her as well as tasks that she needed to complete, thereby reducing distractions:

When I’m at a competition ... there’s always other people cheering me on and there’s a kid jumping next to me, so I see them jumping, but I have to bring my focus back to my horse and only listen to my coach’s voice.

She also mentioned that she had to focus on herself – what she is doing, as well as her horse and what it is doing, saying, “*I would concentrate on my*

position that I have to have on my horse's back and ... if my horse is going too fast or too slow ... or whether he is listening at all".

3. *Own behaviour affects horse behaviour.* EQ4 explained that her horse is very sensitive to what she is doing, saying, "*my horse would feel I'm distracted*". She noted that he would react in accordance with her behaviour, stating, "*if my concentration is not completely on him, he'll most probably throw me off*". EQ4 therefore felt that she could use mindfulness to remain focused, which would typically receive a positive response from her horse. She explained, "*if my concentration is where it is supposed to be, my horse would feel in some sense safe, like he can trust me*".

7.1.3 Transference

EQ4 mentioned that she could possibly transfer the use of mindfulness to (1) her life in general, as well as to (2) school to be aware of external distractions, yet remain focused on her task.

1. *Life in general.* EQ4 anticipated that she could use mindfulness in general to enhance her awareness and still remain focused on her goals in life, stating, "*I should be aware of what is happening around me, but I shouldn't let it distract me from what I am trying to achieve*". By being more aware, she might be less distracted by small obstacles in her way. She indicated this by saying, "*I should not let smaller things distract me from my big dreams*".
2. *School.* EQ4 noted that she could apply mindfulness at school to become aware of external distractions like her friends in class, stating, "*I would be aware that my best friend is sitting next to me, but I would not let it distract me*", as well as other potential distractions in her environment such as "*people standing up and moving their chairs backwards, the sound it's making and the people talking in the background and the teacher talking and the light coming through the windows*". While being aware of her environment, she indicated that she would still apply task-focused attention, saying, "*I would be like okay*".

you are next to me, but I am concentrating on what the teacher is telling me to do, so we can talk afterwards”.

In transferring the application of mindfulness to other areas, EQ4 once again focused only on the mindful awareness of external stimuli and did not include internal experiences.

7.2 ACCEPTANCE

7.2.1 Learning

Through her experience of acceptance, EQ4 learnt that she could (1) accept discomfort and still continue with her task. She formulated (2) her own understanding of what acceptance meant to her and also explained that she found acceptance to be (3) beneficial.

1. *Accepting discomfort:* EQ4 had learnt that discomfort is an inevitable part of life. She expressed this by saying, *“I am going to feel discomfort, whether it is emotional, physical or even thought[s]”*, however, she indicated that acceptance allowed her to continue with her task, stating, *“but I am going to accept it and go on with the task at hand”*. She recognised that it might at times be difficult for her to apply acceptance when she stated, *“even though it might be hard for me to do sometimes”*. She had learnt that using acceptance would allow her to acknowledge discomfort without letting it distract her, as she mentioned, *“I would um, not say like ignore it, but just like temporarily put it aside until I am done at the task at hand and then afterwards, um, deal with the problem that I have figured out and accepted”*.
2. *Understanding acceptance.* For EQ4 acceptance meant to be aware of discomfort, but not paying attention to it. She explained, *“there is something that’s bothering you, but you feel okay ... not concentrating on it the whole time and just moving on”*.

3. *Benefits.* EQ4 explained that applying acceptance during the activities helped her to stay motivated despite her discomfort, stating, “*it was hard for me ... but I did accept it and I kept on trying and I kept on trying until I got it right*”. She also noted that using acceptance would allow for more comfort and less energy wasted on thinking of or trying to change the discomfort, saying, “*I would feel more comfortable with myself if I accepted the problem and I wouldn’t think about it as much as I would’ve if I didn’t accept it*”.

EQ4 illustrated some understanding of acceptance; however, she again used language that might suggest an underlying PST philosophy, rather than a MAC philosophy. This included words such as “temporarily put it aside” and “just moving on” (see 2.1.2 and 2.2.2)

7.2.2 Application

In talking about applying acceptance, EQ4 explained how she could use it to accept her own discomfort, but also to accept discomfort felt by or caused by her horse, namely, (1) dual acceptance. She also illustrated that by using acceptance, (2) her own behaviour would have an impact on her horse’s behaviour, as well as the idea that a lack of acceptance might have (3) negative consequences.

1. *Dual acceptance.* EQ4 noted that she could use acceptance to accept both her own and her horse’s discomfort, saying, “*there might be days that I might have discomfort in any form or my horse might have discomfort, but then I have to accept it*”. She explained that horses act in unpredictable ways at times and therefore she could apply acceptance in such instances to deal with their reactions. She gave an example: “*I didn’t know he was scared of little baskets ... and as I picked the basket out from the jump, my horse started freaking*”. She also mentioned other discomforts like the physical discomfort that her horse might be experiencing, to which she could apply acceptance and gave another example, “*my horse got a new saddle that week and ... his muscles [were] still not used to his new saddle*”. Lastly, she gave an example of a time when she had experienced discomfort and where she could have potentially applied acceptance, stating, “*I had my first competition and I was*

terrified for jumping my first 1.10m class". This indicates that acceptance has a dual purpose in equestrian sport; that is, it can be applied to the discomfort of both the rider and the horse.

2. *Rider behaviour affects horse behaviour.* EQ4 illustrated that the energy from her own body is transferred to her horse, therefore what she does and how she behaves/reacts will influence her horse. She noted that when she applies acceptance, her horse feels it as well, saying, "*my energy has to tell my horse it's fine; we know there's a problem, but we are accepting it and we're moving on*". EQ4 indicated that applying acceptance would make her feel more at ease, which would in turn make her horse feel more at ease, stating, "*if my horse feels that comfort inside of me, he would feel the comfort and accept his problem*". EQ4 also mentioned that a trusting relationship is a prerequisite for building a bond between horse and rider and for acceptance to be applied effectively. She explained that "*if the horse doesn't like you ... no matter if you accept your discomfort ... he wouldn't accept it because he doesn't like you*".
3. *Acceptance versus reacting.* EQ4 explained how acceptance would allow for the comfort of both herself and her horse. She also indicated that a lack of acceptance would mean that she reacts to her emotions which would have negative consequences for herself as well as her horse:

I would have been fighting with myself, or being emotional and my horse would have felt the energy and he would have been like your concentration is not at me, and he would be running around and going too fast and knocking the poles... or just plainly throwing me off.

7.2.3 Transference

EQ4 anticipated that she could apply acceptance to (1) her life in general with regard to general well-being and also within (2) her family. She also indicated that a lack of acceptance could have (3) negative consequences outside sport just as within a sporting context.

1. *Life in general.* EQ4 mentioned that, just as in sport, discomfort in life is inevitable, stating, “*there is always going to be a day that I am going to have conflict, whether it be emotional, physical or just plain simple thought[s]*”. She explained that accepting the discomfort would improve her state of mind rather than make it worse, saying, “*I am going to accept it in order to prevent it from ruining my day*”. For EQ4 accepting a problem would mean dealing with it in a constructive way. She said in this regard that “*by accepting my problems, maybe talking to someone really close to me or an adult who could give me advice about the problem*”. This is as opposed to suppressing the problem which would, according to EQ4, have negative consequences on her mood and general well-being. She explained, “*as not by keeping them to myself and keeping them in until I can’t take it no more and have an emotional breakdown*”.
2. *Family.* EQ4 explained that she could transfer acceptance to her family since she felt that in a family there would inevitably be some form of discomfort, stating, “*family always has conflict, no matter how big or how small, but it always affects you*”. She was of the opinion that she could use acceptance to deal with the discomfort caused by events in her family, saying, “*if one of my parents die or one of my brothers have to go to another country for work, accepting that they won’t be there anymore*”. She also gave an example of a previous application in her family when she was still a child; she explained, “*when I was small my parents used to fight a lot ... it touched me really deep, but I always used to just accept it and play with my friends on the playground*”.
3. *Reacting to discomfort.* EQ4 illustrated how she thought that reacting to discomfort (avoiding it) by trying to make it better might have negative consequences for her general well-being, saying, “*I might become obese because I’m eating too much because I feel the discomfort and trying to make myself feel better*”. She also noted that it might affect other people if she were to react to the discomfort in relation to others, stating, “*I might be mean to them and ruin their day by just being nasty to them*”.

In these reflections, EQ4 referred to both the general meaning of acceptance (accepting misfortune) and the MAC definition (a willingness to experience and endure temporary discomfort) (see 2.2.3.2).

7.3 COMMITMENT

7.3.1 Learning

By experiencing commitment during the MAC programme, EQ4 learnt about the implications of being (1) value-oriented as opposed to outcome-oriented. She also learnt about (2) her own performance values.

1. *Value-oriented versus outcome-oriented.* EQ4 noted that being value-oriented during the activities made the task that she needed to complete seem less daunting, stating, “*by staying committed to my values, it made the task at hand seem easier*”. It also made her feel less tense (decreased emotional discomfort). She explained, “*staying true to my values, um, made me feel at ease and trust more in myself just to, like, keep on trying and going until I get it*”. She indicated that if she had only been focused on the outcome during the activities, she would have reacted to her emotions, which would have had negative consequences, saying, “*I would’ve almost had an emotional breakdown because I can feel the competition’s going and I can’t win it ... and just saying [to herself] you know you can’t do it, just give up*”.

In these reflections, EQ4 illustrated that a value-driven approach may be more effective and produce less discomfort than an outcome-based approach or an emotion-driven approach (see 2.1.2 and 2.2.2).

2. *Personal values.* Through her experience of commitment, EQ4 identified some of her own personal values that were important to her in her performance life; these include “*trust, reliability ... respect and positive thoughts*”. She gave an example of a previous situation where she had been committed to her values and she explained that this had had a positive impact on her performance:

I was terrified ... but staying true to my values of having respect for my horse and trusting in myself and my horse and being reliable on my horse made me somehow feel more comfortable which made my horse more steady and easy ... which made me jump better.

7.3.2 Application

EQ4 firstly explained how and for what reasons she would apply commitment to (1) her own personal values in her sport. During her account of how she could apply commitment, it became evident that commitment to values would have a significant impact on the (2) partnership between her and her horse. She also indicated that applying commitment could have (3) certain benefits.

1. *Personal sport values.* EQ4 indicated that trust is a crucial value for her, stating, “*if I don’t trust in my horse, we wouldn’t be able to um, achieve any of my goals*”. Also, that a lack of commitment towards trust could have negative consequences, saying, “*I would hurt his mouth by pulling too hard on the reins*”. She also explained that patience is an important value because of the communication limitations between her and her horse, stating, “*he can’t talk to me and tell me ... so it would take him longer to understand ... so I shouldn’t get mad at him and get impatient*”. She also regarded reliability as an important value and said that relying on her horse made him feel comforted and loved, saying, “*your horse would love to feel that sense of that you rely on him at certain points of the competition*”. Lastly, EQ4 identified positive thinking as a helpful value because it helped her to see the positive side of matters and remain enthusiastic about her sport, stating, “*positive thoughts would enhance your spirit ... you just want to do everything right*”.

In these reflections, EQ4 referred to “positive thinking” as a value; however, the act of controlling or changing thought content relates to a PST philosophy rather than a MAC philosophy (see 2.1.2 and 2.2.2).

2. *Partnership between horse and rider.* EQ4 explained that being committed to her values would have an impact on her horse’s behaviour which in turn would

affect their training and performance, saying, “*I had to rely on him to help me correct the stride before the jump and by being reliable to him, it made him feel a bit more comfort ... and he started doing more of what I asked him to do*”. She also indicated that the partnership between her and her horse was important and that her horse should feel secure with her instructing him what to do; applying commitment would thus reinforce the feelings of security in the partnership between her and her horse. She explained, “*if I stay committed towards my values and my horse can feel that energy ... which makes my horse feel safe and secure and which would make us perform better*”. She mentioned that a lack of commitment could impair the partnership which might have negative consequences, saying, “*we would’ve plainly not gone to the competition then ... because he didn’t feel any sense of security from me, he only saw me as a threat then*”.

3. *Benefits*. From her experience, EQ4 maintained that applying commitment to her values would lessen her discomfort as well as that of her horse, which would increase her enjoyment and result in required tasks seeming less challenging, stating in this regard, “*by staying committed towards trust, patience, reliability and positive thoughts, my horse would feel secure ... which will make the task at hand easier and more fun and also the tasks to come in the future*”. Staying committed to her values would also enhance the bond between her and her horse, as she noted that “*it would make him [her horse] feel that, okay my rider do [does] really love me and wants me there*”. She also mentioned that applying commitment in a previous experience had helped her to attain a successful outcome, stating, “*we actually got a first place ... which made me feel so nice because I didn’t think we were going to achieve anything at the, in the first week of training*”.

7.3.3 Transference

EQ4 anticipated that she could, firstly, transfer the application of commitment to (1) her life in general (general well-being). She also indicated that she could apply commitment to (2) her personal values and morals to reflect who she is as a person

and, lastly, she said that she could apply commitment in (3) difficult life situations, such as conflict in her family.

1. *Life in general.* EQ4 believed that applying commitment to her life in general could have a positive impact on her general well-being in that she would experience less discomfort, saying, “*committing more to respect and trust made life generally a bit more easier ... made the problems so much easier to face*”. She also indicated that she could use commitment to accept discomfort and still act in accordance with her values in general, stating, “*you are mindful that you have the pain, but you also say, you show people: I am a happy person even though I have a bit of pain*”.
2. *Personal values and morals.* EQ4 regarded it as important to commit to her personal values and morals as this would reflect who she was as a person. She mentioned that she could apply commitment in order to remain true to her values across different contexts, saying, “*if I say committed towards my values they can see: ‘she’s a joyful person and she stays joyful no matter what she does in which situation*”. She also explained that committing to her personal values would enable her to be congruent in relation to others and not compromise her values simply to be approved of by others, stating, “*not lacking commitment towards my values would actually just show them [other people]: ‘okay, she is that person even though I don’t like her ... she doesn’t change just because I don’t like her*”. A lack of commitment to personal values and morals could, according to EQ4, result in her being susceptible to external influences, as she noted, “*if I do lack commitment towards my values in life, I might actually change into someone I actually don’t want to be*”.
3. *Difficult life situations.* EQ4 mentioned that she could apply commitment to her values in difficult life situations where she had to accept the discomfort and still decide to act in accordance with her values. She gave an example of when she had to change schools, stating, “*even though I don’t want to be here [new school], I still stayed the person I am and slowly but surely I started liking being here*”. She also noted an example of conflict in her family and indicated that she

would say the following to herself: “*they’re fighting, it’s not your fault, so accept it ... and then I [she] started being the person I [she] was before*”.

7.4 PERSONAL REFLECTION

My experience of EQ4 was that she was optimistic, enthusiastic and eager to participate during the programme. She conveyed some understanding of the MAC concepts during our interview and also gave interesting examples of lived experiences where she had or could have applied the concepts; however, her reflections were slightly limited in terms of depth and understanding. With regards to mindfulness in particular, EQ4 reflected only on being aware of external distractions while she is participating in her sport and did not reflect on being aware of internal experiences. This may be due to (1) the nature of equestrian sport where there are many external factors that could possibly have an effect on the horse, therefore highlighting the importance of external awareness. It could also be that (2) the limited theory and limited time-span of the programme did not allow for in-depth understanding and reflection to occur. Lastly, it may be that (3) EQ4’s reflections and understanding of the concepts could have been influenced by the fact that English was not her home language and therefore she might not have been able to express herself optimally.

With regard to acceptance and commitment, her reflections did indicate some understanding; however, again not in an in-depth sense. The terms *acceptance* and *commitment* could, however, be viewed as ambiguous in that although the literal meaning of the terms and the more abstract notion of them within the MAC approach are similar, in the MAC approach the terms take on a more complex meaning. This could have added to the somewhat ambiguous reflections obtained from EQ4.

EQ4 also at times unknowingly combined the underlying PST principles and the MAC principles in her reflections and examples. This could possibly be due to prior exposure to a PST approach, as PST was also presented to athletes at the hpc. The limited time-span of the MAC programme may also have contributed to this.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings derived from the interview with EQ4. The focus of the chapter was specifically on the way in which EQ4 made sense of mindfulness, acceptance and commitment with regard to the experiential learning that took place, the possible application to her sport, as well as transference to other areas of her life. The following chapter is the final chapter of the mini-thesis and will discuss the conclusive research findings pertaining to the study as well as make a number of recommendations for further research on the topic.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter provides the final summary of the research findings in relation to the research questions set out in chapter 1. It also makes a number of recommendations for future research studies on this topic.

8.1 RESEARCH FINDINGS

8.1.1 Learning

In chapter 1, three research questions were set out, the first being: What did adolescent equestrians learn experientially about performance development through their participation in an equestrian-specific MAC programme?

8.1.1.1 Mindfulness

By learning experientially about mindfulness, all the equestrians learnt that mindfulness means to have an enhanced sense of awareness (see 4.1.1[1]; 5.1.1[1]; 6.1.1[1]; 7.1.1[1]). Most of them specifically reiterated being aware of external distractions in their environment (see 4.1.1[2]; 5.1.1[2]; 7.1.1[1]). There could be a number of reasons for this, as discussed in the results chapters (see 4.4 and 7.4). One of the reasons that were discussed was the fact that, in equestrian sport, the external environment plays an important role in a horse's reactions. Equestrian sport is essentially a dangerous sport because if a horse takes fright it could potentially result in both the rider and the horse being seriously injured. This could therefore be the reason why the participants regarded awareness of external stimuli as an important aspect. All four equestrians had also gathered that mindfulness allowed them to focus on their task and concentrate on what was required of them, while simultaneously being aware of external distractions (see 4.1.2[2]; 5.1.1[2]; 6.1.1[2]; 7.1.1[1]). This supports the theory of Gardner and Moore (2007) and illustrates the difference between mindful-awareness and mindful-attention: having a broad sense

of awareness within the present moment, yet being focused on the task at hand (see 2.2.3.1). Most of the participants mentioned that the concept of mindfulness was something that they had already applied to a certain extent in their sport, without having theoretical knowledge of what it entailed (see 5.1.2[1]; 6.1.1[3]; 7.1.1[2]). This may indicate the inherent ability of all human beings to apply mindfulness to a certain extent at various moments in time and that the skill can in fact be developed (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Two of the participants had found mindfulness easy to apply during the activities (see 5.1.1[1]; 6.1.1[3]), while EQ1 stated that he experienced some difficulty at first (see 4.1.1 [2]). This could suggest that some individuals may have a natural ability to be mindful whereas others may have to practise the skill to a greater extent. EQ3 was the only participant who had previous theoretical knowledge of mindfulness and she maintained that she had become more proficient in using the skill over time (see 6.1.1 [3]) which correlates with the theory which states that mindfulness is in fact a skill that one can develop over time if practised (as mentioned above).

8.1.1.2 Acceptance

With regard to acceptance, three out of the four participants learnt that certain aspects of life are beyond their control and that they will therefore inevitably experience some form of discomfort at times (see 4.2.1[2]; 6.2.1[1]; 7.2.1[1]). This correlates with the underlying theory of ACT, which states that some element of human suffering is inevitable and that trying to avoid or control the discomfort may prove to be unsuccessful, if not problematic (Hayes, 2004; Hayes & Strosahl, 2004) (see 2.2.1.2). All three also learnt that reacting to the discomfort (particularly emotional discomfort) could have negative consequences and would therefore do more harm than good as it would cause them to behave in an undesirable way, such as taking their frustration out on an object or person (see 4.2.1[2]; 6.2.1[2]; 7.2.2[3]). Therefore, for them, acceptance was the opposite of reacting – acceptance meant to experience discomfort and just let it be. Three of the four equestrians also learnt that acceptance would allow them to focus on the task they were busy with while still being aware of the discomfort or distraction, and that they could revisit the discomfort at a later time in order to handle it constructively (see 4.2.1[1]; 5.2.1[1]; 7.2.1[1]).

From her unique experience, EQ2 learnt that she had the ability to apply acceptance while participating in the activities, as she had been experiencing physical discomfort at the time. She also stated that she should apply acceptance more often in her life as she felt that it was the concept in the programme that she could benefit from the most (see 5.2.1 [2]).

EQ4 expressed the opinion that accepting her discomfort during the activities helped her to stay motivated. She also experienced a sense of comfort when she applied acceptance as opposed to the discomfort she felt before applying the skill (see 7.2.1 [3]).

8.1.1.3 Commitment

Lastly, with regard to commitment, all the participants learnt about their own personal values as equestrian athletes. They learnt that they have unique values that they regard as important in their sport and which direct their actions (see 4.3.1[2]; 5.3.1[3]; 6.3.1[2]; 7.3.1[2]). Three of the four equestrians understood commitment in the more literal sense of the word, namely, as being dutiful, self-disciplined, determined to overcome obstacles (see 4.3.1[1]; 5.3.1[1]; 6.3.1[1]). The word “commitment” may therefore cause some confusion because “commitment” itself can be understood as a value similar to self-discipline or determination, as discussed in chapters 4 and 7 (see 4.4 and 7.4).

EQ3 commented on the interplay between motivation and commitment – she found that committing to her values had a motivational effect and vice versa (the motivational effect in turn fed into her commitment to her values) (see 6.3.1 [3]). This is not in line with Gardner and Moore’s (2007) explanation of commitment and motivation opposing each other (see 2.2.3.3), which may therefore indicate some confusion or discrepancy.

One participant, EQ4, indicated that she experienced less discomfort when she focused on being value-oriented as opposed to being outcome-oriented while participating in the activities. Accordingly, she found the tasks to be less daunting and she experienced a sense of ease (see 7.3.1 [1]). This is interesting as the aim of

MAC is not to lessen discomfort, but rather to allow for the acceptance of discomfort as opposed to avoidance (see 2.2.2). A secondary effect of applying MAC, as expressed by EQ4, may in fact be a reduced sense of discomfort.

8.1.1.4 Summary

The following findings regarding the participants' learning, based on their experiences, were evident: it was emphasised that they understood mindfulness to mean "enhanced awareness", particularly awareness of external stimuli in the environment which may be distracting. The participants also learnt that mindfulness would allow for task-focused attention and awareness of external distractions simultaneously. It was evident that most of the participants found the application of mindfulness familiar, without having heard of it before, although not all of them found it easy to apply. One participant, in particular, experienced some difficulty initially.

Pertaining to acceptance, most participants learnt that some form of discomfort is inevitable during the course of their lives. They concluded that accepting discomfort (particularly emotional discomfort) may have more favourable consequences as opposed to reacting to discomfort in an undesirable manner. This would allow them to focus on- and complete necessary tasks while simultaneously experiencing discomfort.

Learning that took place with regard to commitment mostly involved the participants' own personal values and the way in which these values direct their actions as equestrian athletes. It was also apparent from the participants' reflections that the term "commitment" could be understood in more ways than one, creating some ambiguity.

8.1.2 Application

The second research question, as set out in chapter 1, was as follows: How did adolescent equestrians anticipate applying what they had learnt experientially about performance development through their participation in an equestrian-specific MAC programme to their sport?

8.1.2.1 Mindfulness

All four equestrians anticipated applying mindfulness to become aware of potential and/or actual distractions while they were training or competing (see 4.1.2[1]; 5.1.2[1]; 6.1.2[3]; 7.1.2[1]). They all referred specifically to external distractions, such as spectators and other competitors/horses, as this would seem to be a significant aspect of equestrian sport, as mentioned above (see 4.1.2[1]; 5.1.2[1]; 6.1.2[3]; 7.1.2[1]). All the participants also indicated that they would apply mindfulness in a dual-purpose sense: being aware of what they were experiencing and might find distracting, as well as being aware of what their horses were experiencing and what they might be distracted by (see 4.1.2[1]; 5.1.2[2]; 6.1.2[2]; 7.1.2[2]).

Three of the participants anticipated using mindfulness to enhance their focus/concentration on their specific tasks (task-focused attention) (see 4.1.2[2]; 6.1.2[1]; 7.1.2[1]) which correlates with the literature, particularly Gardner and Moore (2007) (see 2.2.3.1). EQ1 and EQ4 highlighted the fact that mindfulness may be beneficial in that it would enhance their ability to focus and lessen the chances of becoming distracted (see 4.1.2[2]; 7.1.2[2]), while EQ1 and EQ3 predicted that it would be more of a challenge to apply mindfulness in some situations than others, for example when they were in an emotional state (see 6.1.1[3]) or when their thoughts kept wandering to a stressful event in the near future (see 4.1.2[2]).

EQ2 had some unique reflections. She explained that awareness of the horse was essential in her sport (vaulting) as it is a very dangerous sport. Therefore being mindful could in fact have an impact on her safety while training and competing (see 5.1.2 [3]). While realising the possible use of mindfulness, she was the only participant who expressed a concern about applying it. She was concerned that being overly aware could lead to over-thinking which could in turn lead to increased anxiety (see 5.1.2 [4]). This was an interesting observation which could be explored further in studies to follow.

8.1.2.2 Acceptance

In anticipating how they would apply acceptance to their sport, all the participants explained that they could use it to accept the discomfort caused by their horses acting unpredictably, such as taking fright or being uncooperative (see 4.2.2[1]; 5.2.2[1]; 6.2.2[1]; 7.2.2[1]). They also unanimously indicated in relation to their horses that their behaviour would have an effect on how the horse responds. They anticipated that they could use acceptance to act in such a way that would elicit a positive response from the horse as opposed to reacting to emotional discomfort in a way that could potentially worsen the horse's behaviour (see 4.2.2[2]; 5.2.2[1]; 6.2.2[2]; 7.2.2[2]). Most of the participants in this study emphasised the importance of the partnership with their horses, and found acceptance particularly applicable to maintaining and/or enhancing it (see 4.2.2[3]; 6.2.2[3]; 7.2.2[2]). This is in accordance with the literature, which emphasises the importance of the horse and rider relationship for optimal performance, as well as the literature which states that horses are sensitive to their rider's/handler's moods and behaviour and therefore respond accordingly (Tenenbaum et al., 2002; Wipperfurth, 2000; Wolframm & Micklewright, 2010; Wolframm et al., 2010) (see 1.2.2).

As with mindfulness, all the participants indicated that they would apply acceptance in a dual-purpose manner to accept their own, as well as the horse's discomfort, that is, physical discomfort that the horse might be experiencing (see 4.2.2[1]; 5.2.2[2]; 6.2.2[1]; 7.2.2[1]). Two of the participants also highlighted the fact that acceptance might be particularly useful in developing patience when dealing with "difficult" or inexperienced horses (4.2.2[2]; 6.2.2[3]).

EQ3's experience was unique since she had already been applying MAC for a few years. She found that, as with mindfulness, her ability to apply acceptance improved over time (6.2.2 [4]). This may suggest that a follow-up study on the long-term application of the MAC approach might be useful. She stated that applying MAC (specifically acceptance) had improved both her performance and that of her horse (6.2.2 [3]).

EQ2's experience of acceptance differed from that of the other participants in that she had also participated in gymnastics previously. She anticipated that acceptance would be easier to apply in equestrian sport than in gymnastics because of the calming effect that the presence of a horse had on her (5.2.2 [3]).

8.1.2.3 Commitment

All the participants indicated that applying commitment was already, or would eventually be, beneficial in the sense that it might improve their performance and help them to reach their ultimate goals (see 4.3.2[4]; 5.3.2[2]; 6.3.2[1]; 7.3.2[3]). EQ4 anticipated that remaining committed to her values would enhance her partnership with her horse, which would enhance their performance (see 7.3.2 [2]), while EQ1 expressed the opinion that applying commitment would help him to remain motivated (see 4.3.2 [4]); again indicating that equestrians may find commitment and motivation to be related rather than opposing concepts, as described by Gardner and Moore (2007) (see 2.2.3.3). However, it could be that the concepts were not presented clearly during the programme, thereby causing some confusion in some of the participants.

Most of the participants indicated that they would apply commitment to values in relation to the horse. These values included trust, respect and patience, again emphasising the importance of the partnership between horse and rider in equestrian sport (see 4.3.2[1]; 5.3.2[1]; 7.3.2[1]). Two of the participants predicted that a lack of commitment to such values (to the horse) could have negative consequences such as injury, as horses are potentially dangerous animals (see 5.3.2[1]), or could result in a volatile relationship in terms of which the horse might act aggressively/uncooperatively towards the rider (7.3.2[2]).

EQ1 and EQ2 indicated that it might be unrealistic to apply commitment at all times (see 4.3.2[2]; 5.3.2[3]); moreover, EQ2 in particular felt commitment had a negative connotation, as she felt "irritated" by the concept owing to the fact that recurring injuries had had a demotivating effect on her, making it difficult for her to apply commitment (see 5.3.2 [3]). EQ1 anticipated applying commitment in a unique way in that he stated that he would like to use commitment to his values to create

awareness of equestrian sport in his local community as well as awareness of ethical conduct towards horses, as horses are often mistreated in his community (see 4.3.2 [3]). In South Africa horses are still used in the rural areas and townships as working animals and are often the victims of neglect and abuse. This is often not as a result of ill intent by the owners, but rather because of ignorance (Carthorse Protection Association, 2010).

EQ3 also provided some unique insights on the basis of her prior application of MAC. She explained that using acceptance allowed her to channel any discomfort she was feeling in line with her commitment to her values, thereby acting in a constructive way in accordance with her values that would improve her performance, rather than reacting to the discomfort in a destructive way (see 6.3.2 [1]). EQ3 displayed a deeper understanding of the concepts as she related them to her previous experiences of applying them, showing how she had developed her application of the skills. She also indicated how the concepts overflowed into one another and could not be used effectively as separate constructs (see 6.3.3 [4]).

8.1.2.4 Summary

Regarding the application of MAC as anticipated by the participants, the following was evident: it was reiterated by all the participants that applying mindfulness would assist them to become aware of actual and potential distractions in their environment while training or competing. Moreover, it was apparent that they would be able to use it in a dual-purpose manner; that is, becoming aware of what they themselves, as well as their horses, may be experiencing and/or distracted by. Most of the participants concluded that such awareness would be beneficial to them in their sport by enhancing their concentration and possibly reducing the chances of unwanted injuries and accidents related to equestrian sport. Some participants, however, indicated that applying mindfulness may prove to be more challenging under stressful circumstances.

The applicability of acceptance to equestrian sport was clearly indicated by the participants. All of them anticipated applying acceptance (in a dual-purpose manner, as with mindfulness) to accept their own and their horse's discomfort. This would

allow them to act in a manner that would elicit a desirable response from their horses, as horses are sensitive to the behaviour of their riders and/or handlers. Acceptance would also allow the participants to accept the, at times, unpredictable behaviour of horses which may cause discomfort. Acceptance therefore may play an important role in forming and maintaining a healthy partnership between horse and rider in equestrian sport.

It was anticipated by all of the participants that commitment would be beneficial to them, in that it may improve their performance and assist them in reaching their goals in their sport. Most of the participants emphasised applying commitment to values in relation to their horses, such as trust, respect and patience. A lack of commitment to such values may have detrimental effects on the horse-rider relationship, as indicated by two of the participants. Although the participants anticipated that applying commitment to their sport would be beneficial, there were some discrepancies in their understanding of what commitment entails. One participant, in particular, expressed negative feelings regarding the term “commitment” owing to previous negative experiences and current sports injuries.

8.1.3 Transference

The third research question stated: How did adolescent equestrians anticipate transferring what they had learnt experientially about performance development through their participation in an equestrian-specific MAC programme to other areas of their lives?

8.1.3.1 Mindfulness

All four equestrians anticipated transferring the use of mindfulness to their lives in a general sense to enhance their awareness (see 4.1.3[1]; 5.1.3[1]; 6.1.3[1]; 7.1.3[1]). They anticipated that this would allow them to, for example, prioritise their goals (see 5.1.3[1]) and complete tasks despite discomfort (see 6.1.3[1]). Three out of the four participants anticipated transferring the application of mindfulness to school in order to become aware of distractions but remain focused on their schoolwork (see 5.1.3[2]; 6.1.3[2]; 7.1.3[2]). Two participants (EQ1 and EQ3) mentioned that they

could apply mindfulness in their interactions with people (see 4.1.3[2]; 6.1.3[3]). EQ1 in particular stated that he could use it to become aware of the influence that people had on him (4.1.3 [2]).

8.1.3.2 Acceptance

With regard to acceptance, all the participants anticipated using acceptance in their families; either to deal with unfortunate events such as death or illness in their family (see 4.2.3[1]; 6.2.3[2]) or with relationships in their family, as well as during family conflict (see 5.2.3[2]; 7.2.3[2]). All four also indicated that reacting to discomfort may have negative consequences, thereby suggesting that they saw value in applying acceptance (see 4.2.3[2]; 5.2.3[2]; 6.2.3[1]; 7.2.3[3]). The negative consequences that were mentioned included being mean or aggressive towards other people (see 4.2.3[2]), not having friends (see 5.2.3[2]), failing tests (see 6.2.3[1]) and using ineffective avoidance strategies such as overeating (see 7.2.3[3]), again supporting the theory underlying ACT and MAC which states that avoidance strategies may become problematic (see 2.2.1.2; 2.2.2).

Most of the participants indicated that they could transfer the use of acceptance to their lives in general, in any situation that might cause discomfort and also to improve their general sense of well-being (mood) (see 5.2.3[1]; 6.2.3[2]; 7.2.3[1]). EQ2 and EQ3 indicated that they could apply acceptance at school, particularly in stressful situations such as examinations (see 5.2.3 [3]; 6.2.3[1]), whereas EQ1 indicated that acceptance could be applied in the event of ending a romantic relationship (see 4.2.3 [2]).

EQ3 had already applied acceptance to her life and had found it particularly helpful (see 6.2.3 [2]) and EQ2 indicated that out of the three concepts, she found acceptance the most helpful, especially with regard to her life in general and not just her sport (see 5.2.3 [1]).

8.1.3.3 Commitment

Finally, in anticipating how they could transfer the application of commitment to other areas of their lives, all four equestrians indicated that they could apply commitment to their lives in general in various ways. The following areas were specifically mentioned: to reach their goals (see 4.3.3[3]), time management and procrastination (see 5.3.3[1]), overcoming any obstacle in life (see 6.3.3[1]), as well as a general sense of happiness (7.3.3[1]). Three participants indicated that they could apply commitment to their values in school: to be dutiful and also complete tasks despite discomfort (see 4.3.3[2]; 5.3.3[2]; 6.3.3[2]), while two participants (EQ1 and EQ3) mentioned that they could transfer the use of commitment to their interactions with other people, such as friends and family (see 4.3.3[1]; 6.3.3[3]).

EQ2, in particular, felt that committing to her values (such as perseverance) could help her to overcome setbacks resulting from injuries (see 5.3.3 [3]), while EQ4 explained that applying commitment to her values could help her live according to her morals in various contexts and to be confident in who she was without trying to please others (see 7.3.3 [2]). EQ3 explained that transferring commitment (and the entire MAC approach) to her life had been beneficial and again reiterated that all three concepts work together as a whole (see 6.3.3 [4]).

8.1.3.4 Summary

In summary, all the participants anticipated that they could transfer the use of mindfulness to their lives in general to have an enhanced sense of awareness. Most of them also indicated the possibility of transferring its application to the school context, while the possibility of applying mindfulness in relation to other people was also mentioned.

All the participants indicated that they could transfer the use of acceptance to family matters such as unfortunate incidents in the family like death or illness, or to handle conflict and maintain relationships within the family. There was also a strong indication that acceptance could be transferred to everyday life, to accept discomfort and to improve general well-being. Lastly, there was also consensus that reacting on

discomfort may have negative consequences, suggesting that all the participants recognised some value in transferring the application of acceptance to other areas of their lives.

It was unanimously indicated by the participants that they could possibly transfer the use of commitment to various areas of their lives in general (e.g. time management, reaching goals and overcoming obstacles in life). There was also a strong indication that commitment to values could be transferred to the school context, while some of the participants also anticipated transferring commitment to their interactions with friends, family and people in general.

8.2 RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has provided valuable insights into the adolescent equestrians' experiences of the MAC approach, specifically with regard to the experiential learning that took place, and the way in which they anticipated applying what they had learnt to their sport and to other areas of their lives. This study also illustrated the unique interaction, and importance of the partnership between horse and human in equestrian sport, and, hopefully, opened the door for further exploration of performance development in this unique context.

8.2.1 Limitations

The limitations of this study include the programme presentation: the presenter's style with regard to delivery and interaction with the participants may have influenced their experience of the approach. A different presentation style might have contributed to a different experience among the participants. The duration of the programme, consisting of only two days without any follow-up sessions, may also be considered a limitation, and follow-up sessions with the participants might have contributed to a deeper understanding of the concepts. Another factor to consider is the possibility that participants felt pressurised to respond positively to the approach during the interviews, owing to the fact that the interviewer also played the role of presenter. Although this was addressed by differentiating between the two roles, the use of an uninvolved party to play either of the roles may be considered.

8.2.2 Further studies

This study was the first of its kind: a qualitative study of the MAC approach as experienced by adolescent equestrians. Further studies could be valuable in terms of deeper exploration: for instance, a specific case study could shed light on the detailed application of MAC in equestrian sport, highlighting the interaction between a specific horse and rider. A follow-up study may also be valuable for gaining insight into the application of MAC over a period of time, for instance after a one-year period. One could also consider comparing the experience and/or application of the MAC approach among competitors in different equestrian disciplines, such as comparing the experience of MAC among dressage riders to that among show jumpers.

Closure

This study hoped to uncover the personal accounts of adolescent equestrians' experiences of the MAC approach, addressing the need for more qualitative research in counselling psychology and particularly in the field of sport psychology. The experiences of the participants gave deeper insight into their learning in relation to MAC, and the application and transference of MAC, and also shed some light on the unique interaction between horse and rider in equestrian sport.

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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH PERMISSION



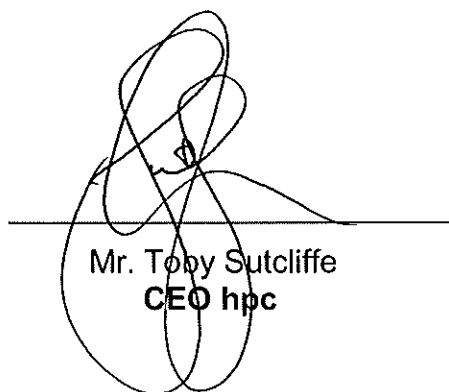
27 February 2012

Consent Letter

I, Mr. Toby Sutcliffe (CEO, High Performance Centre) hereby grant permission to Ile Louisa Schutte (student no: 25335058) to use the adolescent equestrians affiliated to the High Performance Centre (hpc) for her research study. I grant her permission to make use of the premises of the hpc to present the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) workshop and to conduct the relevant interviews needed to complete her MA Counselling Psychology research project with the proposed title of:

Performance development of adolescent equestrians: A Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) Approach.

For any inquiries please feel free to contact me.



Mr. Toby Sutcliffe
CEO hpc

A DECADE OF EXCELLENCE IN SPORT, SCIENCE, KNOWLEDGE

TuKSport (Pty) Ltd. t/a hpc | Reg. No. 2001/020098/07 | Burnett St. | Pretoria | P.O. Box 14622 | Hatfield | 0028
Tel: +27 (0) 12 362 9800 | Fax: +27 (0) 12 362 9890 | E-mail: info@hpc.co.za | www.hpc.co.za
Directors: A. M. de Klerk | N.J. Grové | C. Koornhof | S. Vil-Nkomo

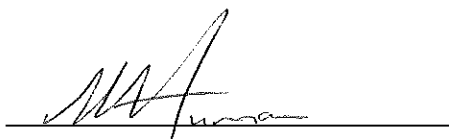
27 February 2012

Consent Letter

I, Mrs. Monja Human (Head Psychologist, High Performance Centre) hereby grant permission to Ile Louisa Schutte (student no: 25335058) to use the adolescent equestrians affiliated to the High Performance Centre (hpc) for her research study. I grant her permission to make use of the premises of the hpc to present the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) workshop and to conduct the relevant interviews needed to complete her MA Counselling Psychology research project with the proposed title of:

Performance development of adolescent equestrians: A Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) Approach.

For any inquiries please feel free to contact me.



Mrs. Monja Human
Head Psychologist hpc

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Directors: A. M. de Klerk | N.J. Grové | C. Koornhof | S. Vil-Nkomo

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH CONSENT



SECTION A RESEARCH INFORMATION

Dear Parent or Guardian of Participant,

The following information is important regarding this research project. Once you have read through the information in Section A, and you are willing to allow your child to participate in the research project, please complete Section B.

Information: I am currently registered for my MA (Counselling Psychology) degree specializing in Sport Psychology, at the University of Pretoria, where I am required to do a dissertation. I am interested in equestrian athletes' experiences of the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment approach to performance development. This is the proposed focus of my research project. Prof. Lourens Human from the Department of Psychology at University of Pretoria is the study leader of my research project. His contact details are: 012-420-3685 or lourens.human@up.ac.za.

Title: The title of the study is: "Performance development of adolescent equestrians: A Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) Approach."

Permission: Permission has been given by Mr. Toby Sutcliffe, the Chief Executive Officer of the High Performance Centre, and Ms. Monja Human, the resident sport psychologist at the High Performance Centre, for the research to be conducted.

Purpose: The study is conducted to understand what your child (an equestrian athlete) has learnt about performance development and the application thereof in equestrian sport and life, through his/her participation in a Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment programme.

Procedures: This research project is qualitative in nature and will require your child to complete the following procedure:

1. To participate in a Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment workshop presented over a two-day period at the High Performance Centre. Your child will be asked to reflect on what he/she learnt about performance development and the application thereof, in equestrian sport and life, in writing. These written accounts will form the basis of a semi-structured interview with your child. This will not interfere with your child's schooling and/or equestrian programme.

2. After the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment workshop is presented, a semi-structured interview will take place at the High Performance Centre where your child will be interviewed on what they have learnt about performance development during the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment programme, and how they can apply it to their equestrian sport, as well as other life areas.

The interviewing process will be audio taped, for the purpose of transcribing the interview accurately for analysis. Ethical considerations and confidentiality will be respected throughout our meetings.

The results from this study will be made available to you, your child and the resident sport psychologist at the High Performance Centre, Monja Human. Furthermore, the results will also be published in a mini-thesis and peer reviewed article.

Roles: During the study I will have dual roles: firstly your child will experience me in the role of a facilitator during the presentation of the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment programme and secondly he/she will experience me as the researcher during the interviews. The interplay between these roles will be handled with sensitivity as to avoid any confusion or discomfort on your child's part.

Risks: There are no perceived physical or psychological risks involved by partaking in this study as the programme and interviews are of a psycho-educational nature. However, should your child wish to discuss what he/she has learnt from the performance development experience, support services will be available at the High Performance Centre by the resident sport psychologist (Monja Human) at no cost.

Benefits: There are no financial gains for participating in the research, but your child may benefit personally in terms of sharing their experiences. Your child may benefit in improved sport and life performance, depending on their experience.

Rights: Participation is voluntary. Your child may withdraw from participating at any time without negative consequences for doing so.

Confidentiality: All information will be treated as confidential. Anonymity will be assured, and the data will be destroyed if your child wishes to withdraw their participation. All possible identifying characteristics will be altered or omitted from the research report.

Material: During the period of the research the data will be stored on my personal computer that only I have access to. After completion of the research, data will be stored in the Department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria for 15 years for archival purposes.

Researcher: If you need further clarity or more information, my contact details are as follows:

Name: Ilé Schutte
Cell no.: 083 236 7371
E-mail: ileschutte@gmail.com

Researcher: (Miss I.L. Schutte)

Date:

Research Supervisor: (Prof. L.H Human)

Date:

Head of Department: (Prof. D. Maree)

Date:

SECTION B
RESEARCH CONSENT

I, (Full name and surname) hereby acknowledge that I have read and understand this research information.

Please indicate whether you give permission to allow/decline your child from participating in this study by marking the appropriate statement:

I give my permission for my child to participate.	
I decline permission for my child to participate.	

I hereby agree to my child's participation in the research project. I accept and agree with the conditions as stated above.

Parent / Guardian: (Signature)

Date:

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH ASSENT



SECTION A
RESEARCH INFORMATION

Dear Participant,

The following information about this research project is important for you to understand. Once you have read the information and you are willing to participate in the project please fill in Section B of this letter.

Information: I am currently registered for my MA (Counselling Psychology) degree specializing in Sport Psychology, at the University of Pretoria, where I am required to do a research project. I am interested in equestrian athletes' experiences of the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment approach to performance development. This will be the focus of my study. Prof. Lourens Human from the Department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria is the study leader of my research project. His contact details are: 012-420-3685 or lourens.human@up.ac.za.

Title: The title of the study is: "Performance development of adolescent equestrians: A Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) approach."

Permission: I have been given permission by Mr. Toby Sutcliffe, the Chief Executive Officer of the High Performance Centre, and Ms. Monja Human, the resident sport psychologist at the High Performance Centre, to do this research project.

Purpose: During this study, the aim is to understand how you (an equestrian sport athlete) experienced the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment programme to performance development and the application thereof in equestrian sport as well as other areas of your life.

Procedures: Should you agree to be a part of this research, you will be asked to do the following:

1. To participate in a Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment workshop presented over a two-day period at the High Performance Centre. You will be asked to reflect on what you learnt about performance development and the application thereof in writing. These written accounts will form the basis of a semi-structured interview. This will not interfere with your schooling and/or equestrian programme.
2. After the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment workshop is presented, a semi-structured interview will take place at the High Performance Centre where you will be interviewed on what you have learnt about performance development during

the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment programme, and how you can apply it to your equestrian sport and life.

I will do my best to give an accurate reflection of your story, and this will be verified with you. The interviewing process will be audio taped. This is so that I can transcribe the interviews and get the needed information from them. I will keep our discussions confidential and respect ethical guidelines.

The results from this study will be made available to you, your parents and the resident sport psychologist at the High Performance Centre, Monja Human. Furthermore, the results will also be published in a mini-thesis and peer reviewed article.

Roles: During the study I will have dual roles: firstly you will experience me in the role of a facilitator during the presentation of the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment programme and secondly you will experience me as the researcher during the interviews. I will explain this to you in detail so that you won't get confused or feel uncomfortable at any time during the process.

Risks: There are no perceived physical or psychological risks involved to you should you decide to be a part of the research. This is because the programme and interviews are of a psycho educational nature (it is not therapy). However, if you would like to talk about what you have learnt from the performance development experience, you are welcome to make an appointment with the resident sport psychologist at the High Performance Centre (Monja Human) at no cost.

Benefits: You will not receive any form of payment for participating in the research, but you may benefit personally in terms of sharing your experiences. You may also benefit in improved athletic performance, depending on your experience.

Rights: Participation is voluntary, meaning that you can choose whether you would be willing to participate or not. You may also withdraw from participating at any time and it will not affect you in any negative way.

Confidentiality: The information that I get from you will not be shared with other people. Anonymity will be assured, meaning that I will not use your real name when I write my research report. If you wish to withdraw your participation, I will destroy all the information that you have given to me and it will not be used in the study.

Data: During the period of the research the data (the information that you give to me during the interview) will be stored on my personal computer that only I have access to. After I have completed my research, the data will be stored in the Department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria for 15 years for archival purposes.

Researcher: If you need more information or have any questions, my contact details are as follows:

Name: Ilé Schutte
Cell no.: 083 236 7371
E-mail: ileschutte@gmail.com

Researcher: (Miss I.L. Schutte)

Date:

Research Supervisor: (Prof. L.H. Human)

Date:

Head of Department: (Prof. D. Maree)

Date:

SECTION B
RESEARCH ASSENT

I, (Full name and surname) hereby acknowledge that I have read and understand this research information.

Please indicate whether you would like to participate in this study by making the appropriate statement:

I agree to participate	
I decline to participate	

I hereby agree to participate in the research project. I accept and agree with the conditions as stated above.

Participant: (Signature)

Date:

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH SUPPORT



02 March 2012

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, Monja Human, the resident sport psychologist at the High Performance Centre at the University of Pretoria, am prepared and willing to see the participants in the study of Ile Louisa Schutte (student no: 25335058) on an individual basis if the need for individual sessions arise. These services will be rendered free of charge.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MH' with a flourish at the end.

Monja Human

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APPENDIX E

EQUESTRIAN SPORTS OVERVIEW

EQUESTRIAN SPORTS OVERVIEW

1. Dressage

The discipline of dressage is all about the obedience, athletic ability, suppleness and elegance of the horse. The competitors ride a set pattern of movements, displaying these qualities in their horse. At the highest level of competition the horses perform intricate and challenging movements while seeming relaxed and balanced, and which to the onlooker may seem as if the horse is “dancing”. The performance is then scored by judges and the highest score wins (DressageSA, n.d.; Hoof, n.d.).



2. Cross Country

Cross country tests the stamina and boldness of the horse and rider combination. Competitors are required to complete a long-distance course (up to 6 km) during which they have to jump over and manoeuvre through a number of fixed obstacles. Obstacles test the horse's athleticism and bravery as they consist of solid fences, logs, hedges, ditches and water jumps. The combination that can complete the course in the fastest time, with the least number of penalties, is the winner. Penalties are incurred when mistakes are made, such as when the horse refuses an obstacle (Hoof, n.d.).



3. Show jumping

Show jumping is a discipline in which the horse and rider are required to jump over a number of fences or “jumps” set out in a numbered order in an arena. The course generally consists of many turns and changes of direction and the aim of the discipline is for the horse and rider combination to complete the course within the allocated time without incurring penalties. Penalties are given when mistakes are made, such as when the horse “knocks” a fence and some of the poles fall to the ground or when the horse refuses to jump a fence.

The fence height varies and depends on the level and experience of the horse and rider combination. At the highest level of competition the fences are between 1,50 and 1,70 metres high (Hoof, n.d.).



4. Eventing

Eventing is an equestrian sport that consists of three phases/disciplines (almost like a triathlon). The three phases are dressage, cross country and show jumping (see above). The competition lasts three days – one discipline per day. The competitor with the fewest penalties (accumulated for mistakes made) at the end of all three disciplines is the winner (Hoof, n.d.).

5. Endurance

Endurance is a discipline that tests the rider and, more specifically, equine fitness and endurance. Competitors are required to cover a substantial distance (distance will vary according to the level of competition) in the fastest amount of time without over-exerting their horses. In order to monitor fatigue and exertion, horses have to pass veterinary checks along the way where their heart rate and condition is monitored. If they do not pass the veterinary inspection, they may not continue with the event. Terrain to be covered may differ and it is up to the rider to determine and maintain a sustainable pace for his/her horse (Endurance South Africa, n.d.; Hoof, n.d.).



6. Showing

Showing is a discipline in which competitors strive to exhibit specimens as near as perfect to their particular breed or type. Exhibitors show off their horses in terms of conformation, movement, temperament and turnout. Judges give each participant a score, taking these factors into account, and the highest score wins. Overall balance and presence, condition, as well as natural movement, are important to catch the judge's eyes. There are various different classes of showing that competitors can compete in; some are ridden classes where the horses are mounted and ridden during the class and some are "in-hand" classes where the horse is shown without a rider, but rather with a "handler" who leads the horse around and shows off their conformation and movement (Hoof, n.d.; Showing Association of South Africa, 2014).



7. Vaulting

Vaulting is a discipline that can best be described as “gymnastics on a moving horse”. The horse moves in a 15-metre circle and is controlled by a “lunger” (a person who holds the lead attached to the horse’s bridle and controls the speed that the horse moves at) who stands in the middle of the circle. While the horse continues to walk/trot or canter at a steady pace, the vaulter(s) performs exercises on the horse’s back using specialist equipment. The competitors are scored by judges and the best score wins. Vaulters with a background in dance, martial arts or gymnastics generally do well in this discipline (Hoof, n.d.).



8. Driving

Driving is in essence carriage driving turned into a sport. The driver, seated on the horse carriage, controls and directs the horse(s) pulling the carriage through a marked course. A driving competition may be split in the following three phases (Hoof, n.d.; Kwazulu-Natal Horse Society, n.d.):

- a. Dressage – a driver completes a sequence of set movements from memory, in order to display the schooling and obedience of the horses being driven.
- b. Marathon – drivers move their horses through a cross country course with a number of obstacles positioned throughout the final 10 kilometre leg of the marathon phase.
- c. Cone driving – a phase which tests the skill and competence of the driver and the suppleness and obedience of the horse(s). The carriage must be driven through narrowly spaced pairs of cones situated throughout the course in a set amount of time.



9. Equitation

Equitation is a discipline that is committed to effective and correct riding with the aim of producing skilled riders who are well equipped in the art of horse riding and horsemanship. Competitors are required to complete a course consisting of specific riding patterns as well as jumping a couple of fences. Riders are scored on their style of riding, control of the horse, correct and effective use of aids and the quality of contact they have with the horse (South African Equitation Association, 2014).



10. Western Riding

Western riding refers to the riding style originally adopted by early American settlers, which can be commonly described as “cowboy” style. Reining is a popular discipline in Western riding, which requires the rider to guide his mount through a precise pattern of spins, circles and stops. The horse must be very well trained to respond willingly, quickly and with precision to the rider’s inconspicuous aids, demonstrating unity between horse and rider (Hoof, n.d.; Western Equestrian Association of South Africa, n.d.).



APPENDIX F

MINDFULNESS-ACCEPTANCE-COMMITMENT (MAC) PROGRAMME

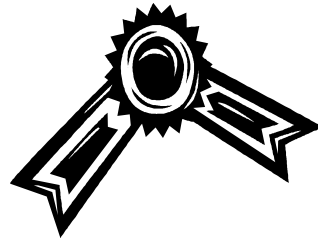
MODULE 1

INTRODUCTION



1

OUTCOMES



The outcomes of this module are:

- 1.1 To understand the **Multilevel Classification System for Sport Psychology (MCS-SP)**.
- 1.2 To understand the four levels of the MCS-SP through examples of practical experiences.

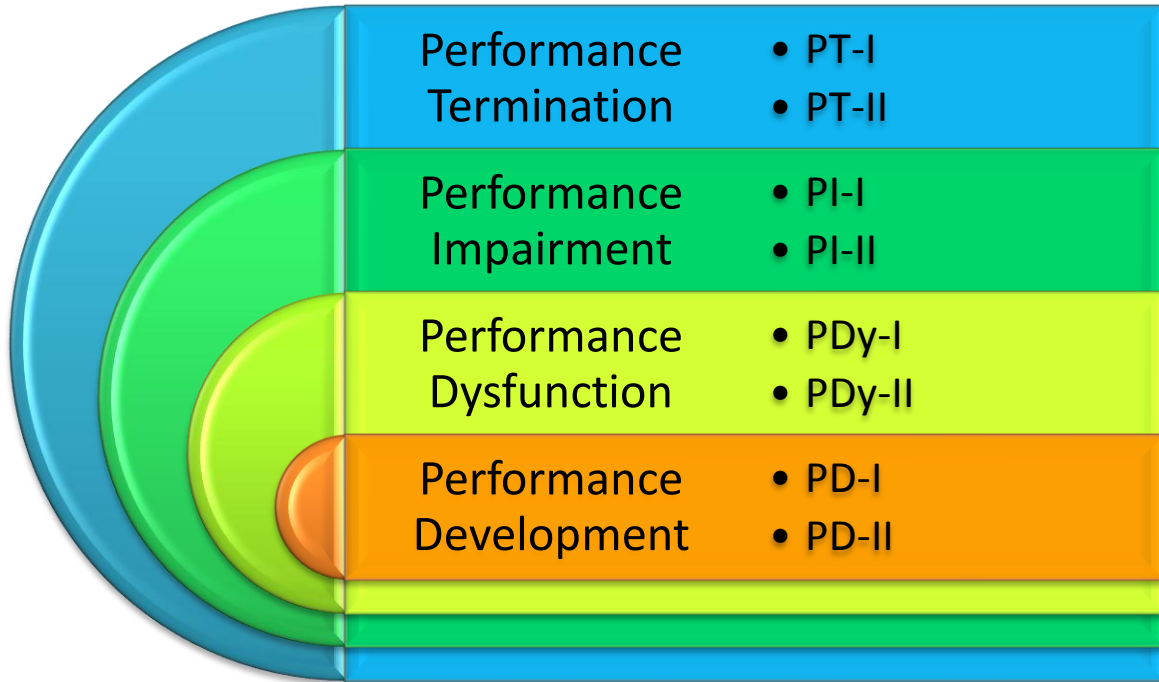


2

CONCEPTS

2.1

Multilevel Classification System for Sport Psychology



MCS-SP... "A (1) system developed to (2) classify athletes according to their (3) psychological and performance enhancement needs within 4 levels each with 2 sublevels".

4 LEVELS:

1. PT- When an athlete retires from their competitive career.

- **PT-I: Voluntary** (expected) retirement.
- **PT-II: Involuntary** (unexpected) retirement.

Can you think of someone who retired **voluntarily** from their sport?

Can you think of someone who retired **involuntarily** from their sport?

ACTIVITY: Retirement quotes

2. PI- When an athlete has a serious psychological problem that interferes with- or temporarily stops them from competing.

- **PI-I:** When someone has a **clinical problem**, like for instance an eating disorder, that nearly or completely disables performance.
- **PI-II:** When an athlete behaves in a way that results in an external decision to limit performance due to **behavioural deregulations** (personality disorders, drug/alcohol abuse etc.).

Do you know of someone that had to stop competing due to a clinical disorder or behavioural problem?

ACTIVITY: Performance Impairment examples

3. PDy- When an athlete is not performing up to his/her ability due to a barrier that is influencing their performance.

- **PDy-I:** The barrier is **external** (outside) of the athlete, either in his/her environment or circumstance i.e. moving to a new school.
- **PDy-II:** The barrier is **internal** (inside) of the athlete like for instance fear of failure or performance anxiety.

Can you think of some barriers in your own life that might have influenced your performance?

ACTIVITY: Video

4. PD- When an athlete is functioning well and only requires performance enhancement.

- **PD-I:** Athletes who are not yet at a top level and **can improve** on their skills.
- **PD-II:** Athletes who are already performing at an **elite level**.

How do you think performance enhancement can be helpful to both amateur and elite athletes?

MINDFULNESS-ACCEPTANCE-COMMITMENT = PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT

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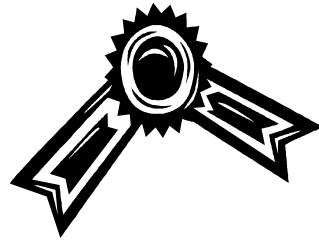
MODULE 2

MINDFULNESS



1

OUTCOMES



The outcomes of this module are:

- 1.1 To understand the concept **mindfulness**.
- 1.2 To practice **mindfulness** through activities.
- 1.3 To reflect on your learning regarding **mindfulness**.
- 1.4 To reflect on your application of **mindfulness** to **equestrian sport**.
- 1.5 To reflect on your application of **mindfulness** to **life**.

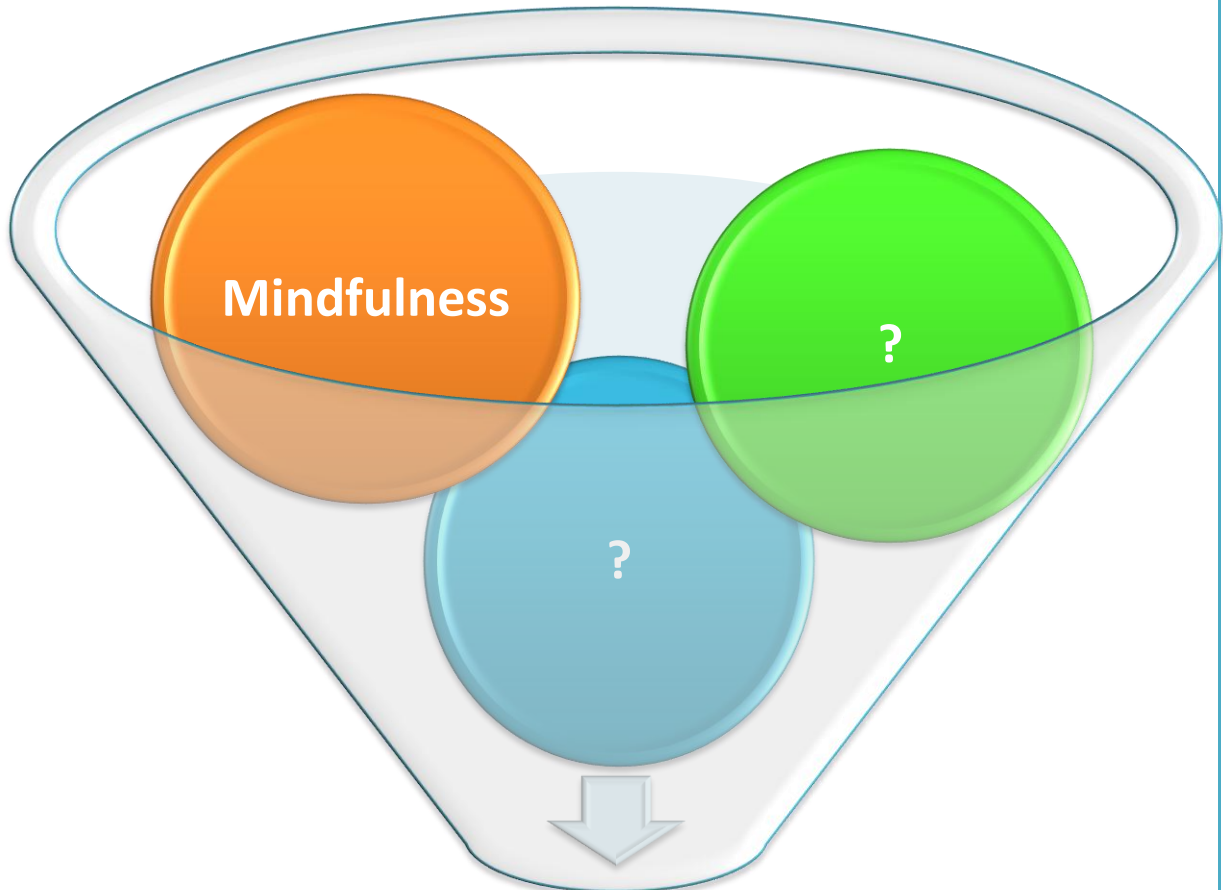


2

CONCEPTS

2.1

Mindfulness



M??

Mindfulness ... "is the ability of an equestrian to be (1) acutely aware of what is happening inside and around him/her (2) in the here-and-now (present moment) while at the same time being (3) fully engaged in the required task at hand."

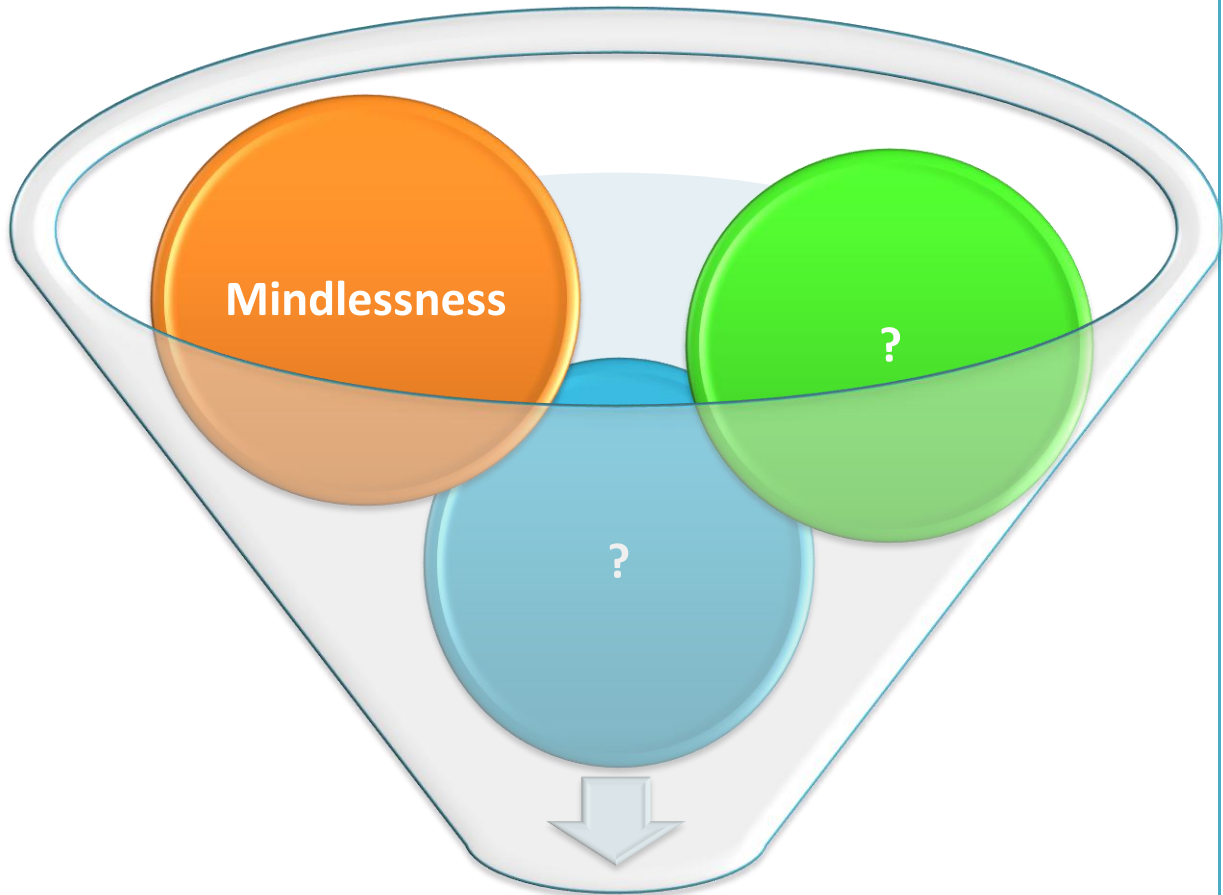
You AND your mind are ACTIVE in the PRESENT

Can you describe one mindfulness experience from your **equestrian sport**?

Can you describe one mindfulness experience from your **life**?

2.2

Mindlessness



M??

Mindlessness ...“is the opposite of Mindfulness meaning that an equestrian is (1) shifting his/her awareness between (2) memories of the past and/or (3) possibilities/worries about the future, thereby NOT being aware in the (4) here-and-now (present moment) and NOT being (5) fully engaged in the required task at hand.”

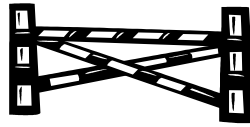
You are in the present but your MIND is somewhere ELSE

Can you describe one mindlessness experience from your **equestrian sport**?

Can you describe one mindlessness experience from your **life**?

3

ACTIVITIES



3.1

Mindfulness Activity:

Dickey Tower

Equipment:

- ✓ Dice (x10)
- ✓ Ice cream stick

Activity:

- ✓ Each participant will receive a number of dice as well as an ice cream stick.
- ✓ The aim is to see how many dice each participant can balance on one end of the ice cream stick while holding the ice cream stick in his/her mouth.
- ✓ Participants are also instructed to note and try to remember anything they are aware of while doing this activity: anything outside of their body (sights, sounds) as well as anything inside their body (feelings, thoughts, sensations).
- ✓ After a certain time has passed the participants will discuss how many dice they could balance and also what they were aware of while doing the activity.

What did you learn about mindfulness from this activity?

What did you learn about *YOUR* mindfulness from this activity?

3.2

Mindfulness Activity:

Video

- ❖ Participants watch a video about a girl riding/jumping a horse with no tack.

Discussion:

- ✓ How do you think mindfulness is displayed in this video?

What did you learn about mindfulness from this activity?

What is your overall experience of mindfulness from the two activities?

“Riding is a partnership. The horse lends you his strength, speed and grace, which are greater than yours. For your part, you give him guidance, intelligence and understanding which are greater than his. Together you can achieve a richness that neither can alone.”

-Lucy Rees



4

REFLECTION



In this module **mindfulness** is described as "the ability of an equestrian to be (1) acutely aware of what is happening inside and around him/her (2) in the here-and-now (present moment) while at the same time being (3) fully engaged in the required task at hand." ***You AND your mind are ACTIVE in the PRESENT***

4.1

Learning Reflection

Based on this description of mindfulness what did you learn about your own mindfulness through your participation in the "Mindfulness Activities"?

4.2

Application Reflection

(Equestrian sport)

Based on what you learnt about mindfulness, how do you anticipate applying mindfulness to your **equestrian sport**?

4.3

Application Reflection

(Life)

Based on what you learnt about mindfulness, how do you anticipate applying mindfulness to your **life**?

REFERENCES

- Brown, K.W., Ryan, R.M., & Cresswell, J.D. (2007). Mindfulness: Theoretical foundations and evidence for its salutary effects. *Psychological Inquiry, 18*, 211-237.
- Gardner, F. L., & Moore, Z. E. (2004). A mindfulness-acceptance-commitment-based approach to athletic performance enhancement: Theoretical considerations. *Journal of Behavior Therapy, 35*, 707-723.
- Gardner, F. L., & Moore, Z. E. (2006). *Clinical sport psychology*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Gardner, F. L., & Moore, Z. E. (2007). *The psychology of enhancing human performance: The mindfulness-acceptance-commitment (MAC) approach*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 10*, 144-156.

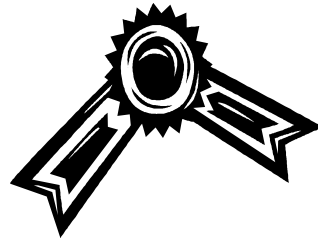
MODULE 3

ACCEPTANCE



1

OUTCOMES



The outcomes of this module are:

- 1.1 To understand the concept **acceptance**.
- 1.2 To practice **acceptance** through activities.
- 1.3 To reflect on your learning regarding **acceptance**.
- 1.4 To reflect on your application of **acceptance** to **equestrian sport**.
- 1.5 To reflect on your application of **acceptance** to **life**.

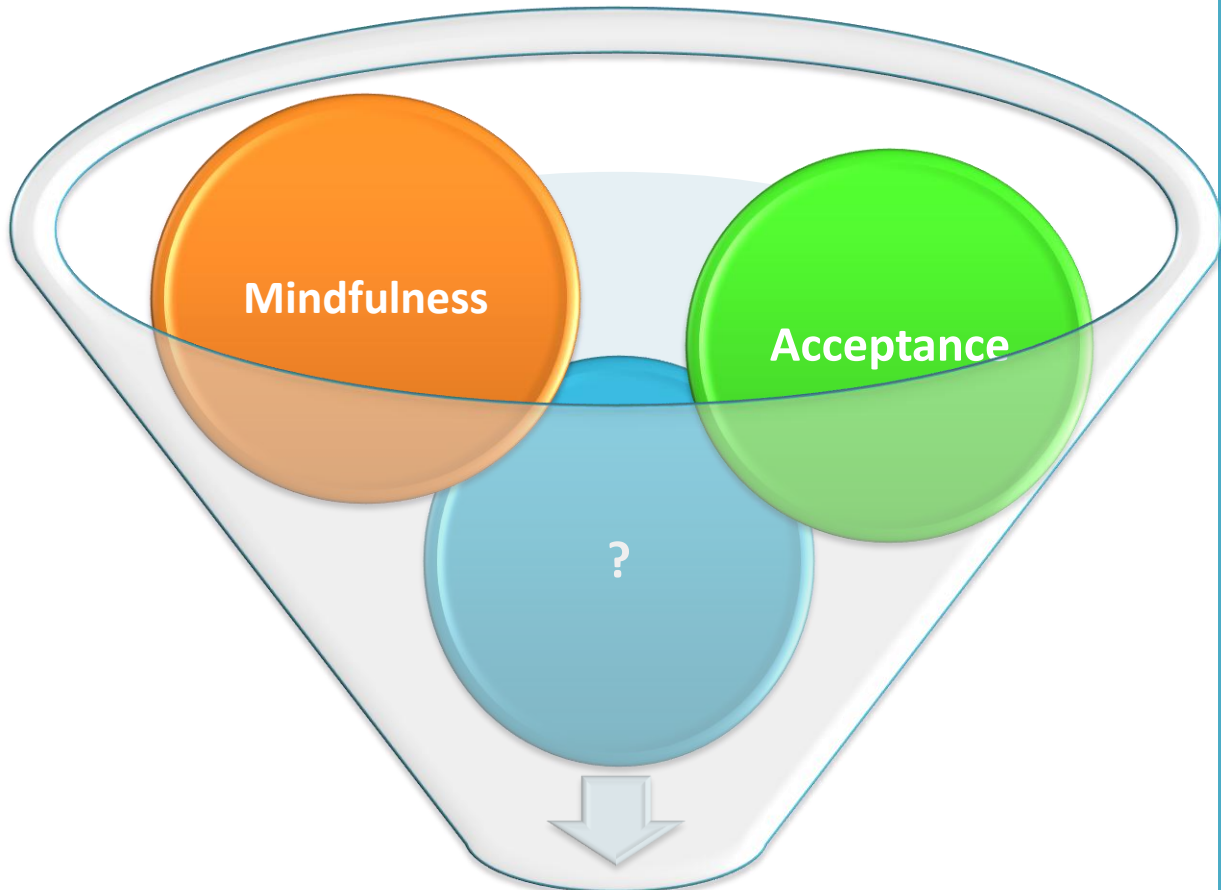


2

CONCEPTS

2.1

Acceptance



MA?

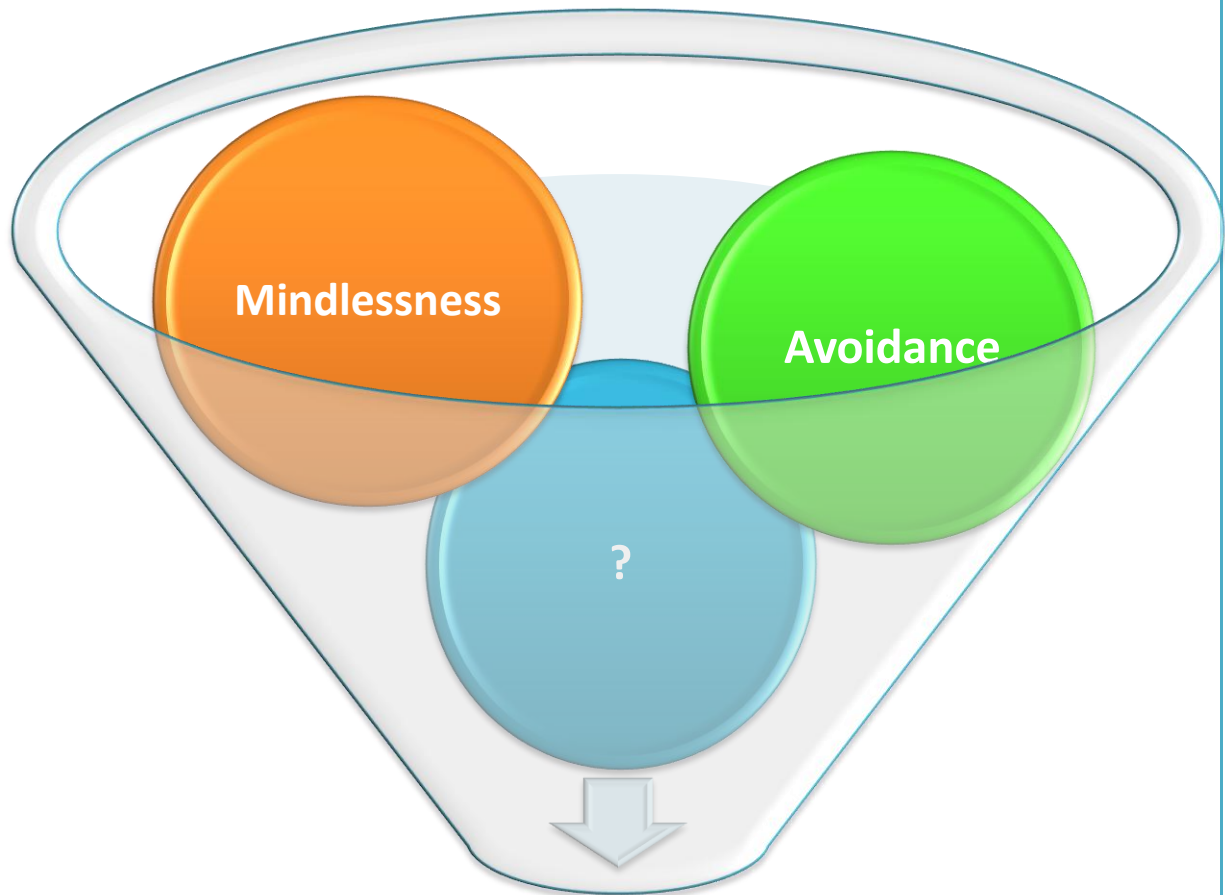
Acceptance ...“is the ability of an equestrian to (1) experience discomfort willingly and in a neutral way. The discomfort may be caused by (2) physical sensations (**Body**), (3) internal experiences (thoughts-**Mind** & emotions-**Heart**) and (4) external stimuli (**World**)”. *Remember **BMW-H***

Can you describe one acceptance experience from your **equestrian sport**?

Can you describe one acceptance experience from your **life**?

2.2

Avoidance



MA?

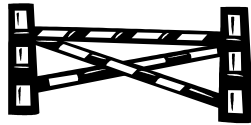
Avoidance ... "is to be (1) unwilling to experience discomfort caused by (2) physical sensations (Body), (3) internal experiences (thoughts-Mind & emotions-Heart) and (4) external stimuli (World) by judging, denying or trying to change the experience.

Can you describe one avoidance experience from your **equestrian sport**?

Can you describe one avoidance experience from your **life**?

3

ACTIVITIES



3.1

Acceptance Activity:

Dicey Tower

Equipment:

- ✓ Dice (x10)
- ✓ Ice cream stick
- ✓ Blindfolds

Activity:

- ✓ Each participant will receive a number of dice as well as an ice cream stick.
- ✓ The aim is to see how many dice each participant can balance on one end of the ice cream stick while holding the ice cream stick in his/her mouth.
- ✓ Before the activity is started, participants are blindfolded and spun around.
- ✓ After a certain time has passed the participants will discuss how many dice they could balance and also what they were aware of while doing the activity and how they tried to apply acceptance.

What did you learn about acceptance from this activity?

What did you learn about YOUR acceptance from this activity?

3.2

Acceptance Activity:

Video

- ❖ Participants watch a video about Lee Pearson (Para-dressage rider)

Discussion:

- ✓ How do you think acceptance is displayed in this video

- ❖ Participants watch a video about tennis players behaving badly

Discussion:

How do you think avoidance is displayed in this video?

What did you learn about acceptance from this activity?

What is your overall experience of acceptance from the two activities?

*"She is brilliant all the time, she is always brilliant,"
said a happy Reed Kessler (18 yrs) about her horse
Cylana after their Olympic debut where they only
had one time penalty.*



4

REFLECTION



In this module **acceptance** is described as ...“the ability of an equestrian to (1) experience discomfort willingly and in a neutral way. The discomfort may be caused by (2) physical sensations (Body), (3) internal experiences (thoughts-Mind & emotions-Heart) and (4) external stimuli (World)”. ***Remember BMW-H***

4.1

Learning Reflection

Based on this description of acceptance what did you learn about your own acceptance through your participation in the “Acceptance Activities”?

4.2

Application Reflection

(Equestrian sport)

Based on what you learnt about acceptance, how do you anticipate applying acceptance to your **equestrian sport**?

4.3

Application Reflection

(Life)

Based on what you learnt about acceptance, how do you anticipate applying acceptance to your **life**?

REFERENCES

- Gardner, F. L., & Moore, Z. E. (2004). A acceptance-acceptance-commitment-based approach to athletic performance enhancement: Theoretical considerations. *Journal of Behavior Therapy, 35*, 707-723.
- Gardner, F. L., & Moore, Z. E. (2006). *Clinical sport psychology*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Gardner, F. L., & Moore, Z. E. (2007). *The psychology of enhancing human performance: The acceptance-acceptance-commitment (MAC) approach*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing.
- Schwanhausser, L. (2009). Application of the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) protocol with an adolescent springboard diver. *Journal of Clinical Sports Psychology, 4*, 377-395.

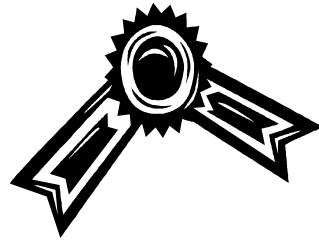
MODULE 4

COMMITMENT



1

OUTCOMES



The outcomes of this module are:

- 1.1 To understand the concept **commitment**.
- 1.2 To practice **commitment** through activities.
- 1.3 To reflect on your learning regarding **commitment**.
- 1.4 To reflect on your application of **commitment** to **equestrian sport**.
- 1.5 To reflect on your application of **commitment** to **life**.



2

CONCEPTS

2.1

Commitment



MAC

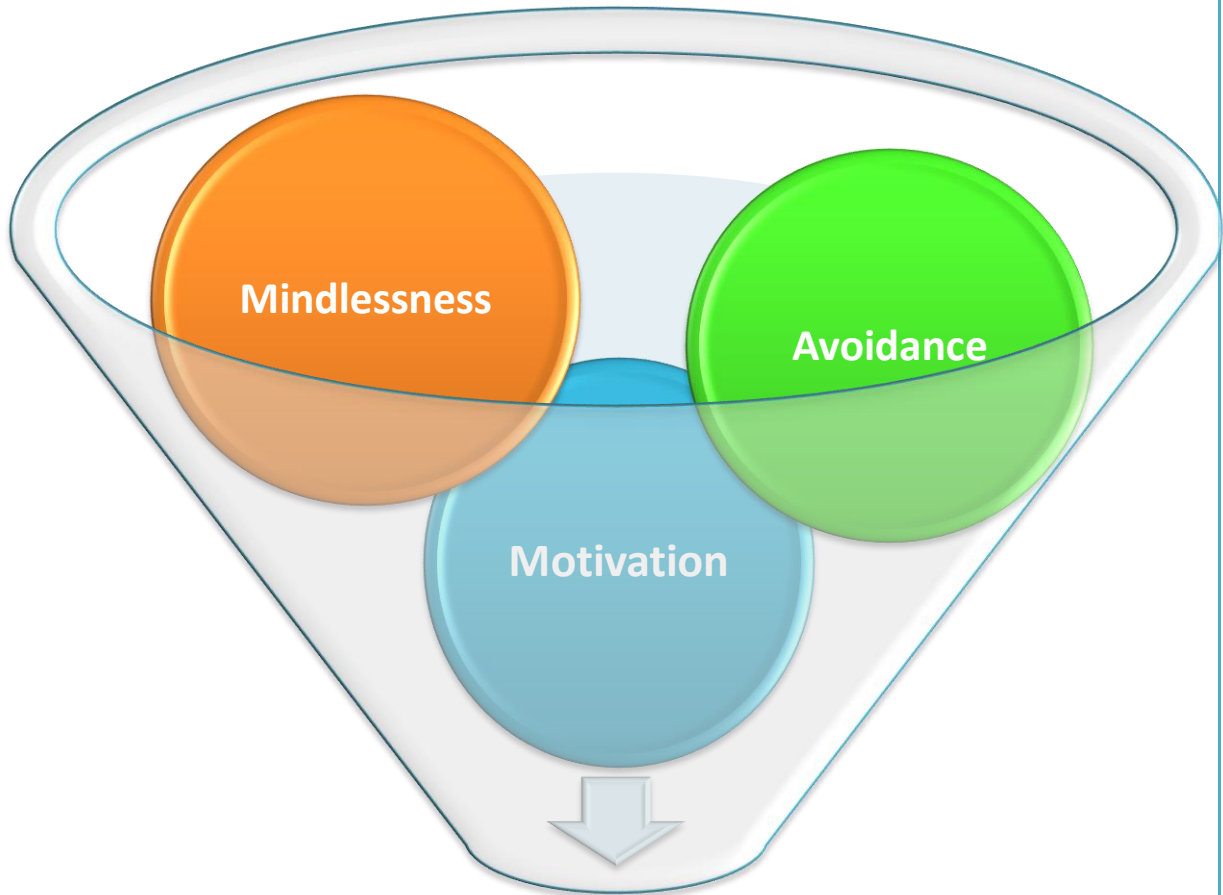
Commitment ...“is the ability of an equestrian to (1) continuously act on their (2) performance-values rather than their emotions in order to (3) reach their goals.”

Can you describe one commitment experience from your **equestrian sport**?

Can you describe one commitment experience from your **life**?

2.2

Motivation



MAM

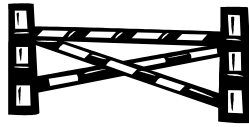
Motivation ... "is the (1) desire of an equestrian to attain a certain goal driven by (2) emotions **WITHOUT** the (3) necessary value-driven actions to do so.

Can you describe one motivation experience from your **equestrian sport**?

Can you describe one motivation experience from your **life**?

3

ACTIVITIES



3.1

Commitment Activity:

Dicey Tower

Equipment:

- ✓ Dice (x10)
- ✓ Ice cream stick
- ✓ Pen and paper

Activity:

- ✓ Each participant will receive a number of dice, ice cream stick and pen and paper.
- ✓ The aim is to see how many dice each participant can balance on one end of the ice cream stick while holding the ice cream stick in his/her mouth.
- ✓ Before the activity is started, participants are instructed to write down one performance value that they will commit to while doing the activity.
- ✓ To add some pressure, the activity is turned into a competition: the participant that can balance the most dice in 3mins wins a prize.
- ✓ After the activity is completed the participants will discuss what they were aware of while doing the activity and how they tried to apply acceptance as well as what they did to act in accordance with their identified performance value.

What did you learn about commitment from this activity?

What did you learn about YOUR commitment from this activity?

3.2

Commitment Activity

Video

- ❖ Participants watch a video of Regina Mayer and her cow Luna.

Discussion:

- ✓ How do you think commitment is displayed in this video?

What did you learn about commitment from this activity?

What is your overall experience of commitment from the two activities?

"Riding a horse is not a gentle hobby, to be picked up and laid down like a game of solitaire. It is a grand passion. It seizes a person whole and, once it has done so, he will have to accept that his life will be radically changed." - Ralph Waldo Emerson



4

REFLECTION



In this module **commitment** is described as ...“the ability of an equestrian to (1) continuously act on their (2) performance-values rather than their emotions in order to (3) reach their goals.”

4.1

Learning Reflection

Based on this description of commitment what did you learn about your own commitment through your participation in the “Commitment Activities”?

4.2

Application Reflection

(Equestrian sport)

Based on what you learnt about commitment, how do you anticipate applying commitment to your **equestrian sport**?

4.3

Application Reflection

(Life)

Based on what you learnt about commitment, how do you anticipate applying commitment to your **life**?

REFERENCES

- Gardner, F. L., & Moore, Z. E. (2004). A commitment-commitment-commitment-based approach to athletic performance enhancement: Theoretical considerations. *Journal of Behavior Therapy, 35*, 707-723.
- Gardner, F. L., & Moore, Z. E. (2006). *Clinical sport psychology*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Gardner, F. L., & Moore, Z. E. (2007). *The psychology of enhancing human performance: The commitment-commitment-commitment (MAC) approach*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing.

MODULE 5

INTEGRATION



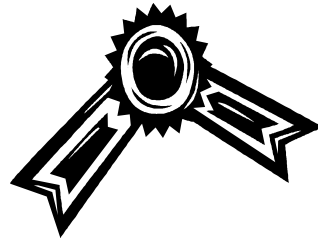
M

A

C

1

OUTCOMES



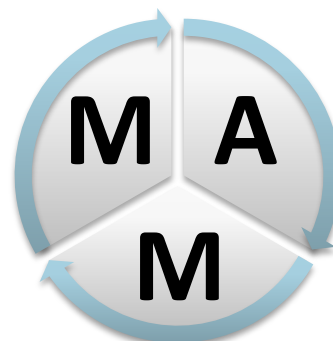
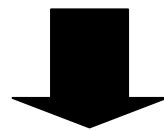
The outcomes of this module are:

- 1.1 To revise the concepts: *Mindfulness Acceptance and Commitment*.
- 1.2 To integrate the concepts: *Mindfulness Acceptance and Commitment*.
- 1.3 To reflect on the experience and application of *Mindfulness Acceptance and Commitment*.



CONCEPTS: REVISION

<p><u>M</u>INDFULNESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Acutely aware ➤ Inside and outside ➤ Here-and-now ➤ Fully engaged in task <p>*You AND your mind are ACTIVE in the PRESENT*</p>	<p><u>M</u>indlessness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Shifting awareness ➤ Past to future ➤ NOT aware in the here-and-now ➤ NOT fully engaged in task <p>*You are in the present but your MIND is somewhere ELSE*</p>
<p><u>A</u>CEPTANCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Experience discomfort ➤ Willingly ➤ Neutral ➤ BMW-H <p>(BODY, MIND, WORLD, HEART)</p>	<p><u>A</u>voidance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Unwilling to experience ➤ Judging ➤ Denying ➤ Trying to change <p>(BODY, MIND, WORLD, HEART)</p>
<p><u>C</u>OMMITMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ CHOOSE ➤ Continuously ACT on performance-values ➤ To reach goals <p>Listen to values NOT emotions</p>	<p><u>M</u>otivation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Desire ➤ Driven by emotions ➤ WITHOUT value-driven actions



3

INTEGRATION



4

REFLECTION

Can you think of three imperative parts in your **equestrian sport** that work together to form a whole?

How do you think the three concepts of Mindfulness Acceptance and Commitment can work together as a whole to enhance performance in **equestrian sport**?



How do you think the three concepts of Mindfulness Acceptance and Commitment can work together as a whole to enhance performance in equestrian sport?

CHALLENGE:

Are you going to be a **MAC** equestrian
or a **MAM** equestrian?



REFERENCES

- Gardner, F.L. (2009). Efficacy, mechanisms of change and the scientific development of Sport Psychology. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology, 3*, 139-155.
- Gardner, F. L., & Moore, Z. E. (2004). A mindfulness-acceptance-commitment-based approach to athletic performance enhancement: Theoretical considerations. *Journal of Behavior Therapy, 35*, 707-723.
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- Moore, Z.E. (2009). Theoretical and empirical development of the Mindfulness Acceptance Commitment (MAC) Approach to performance enhancement. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology, 3*, 291-302.

APPENDIX G

RESEARCH PROJECT



14 May 2012

The Chair

Prof John Sharp

Postgraduate Committee

Faculty of Humanities

University of Pretoria

Pretoria

Dear John

HPC PROJECT AND LOURENS HUMAN'S STUDENTS

After Lourens Human and I discussed the HPC project and various role players, we have decided on the format below for the research project at the HPC on performance development. Although each thesis and dissertation will make an independent contribution, i.e. each will stand on its own legs so to speak, I will attach this letter to each application to clarify the larger project to reviewers on your committee.

PhD-Students

There are two PhD-students, Maurice Aronstam and Theo Bezuidenhout. Both students will be doing mixed methods projects, with Maurice Aronstam working with HPC coaches and Theo Bezuidenhout working with HPC parents. Although both projects are part of the larger project, each student will develop and present their own MAC programmes to their respective participants, while data gathering and analysis (quantitative & qualitative) will be done individually by each student. The supervisors for these two projects will be Lourens Human and I. Please note that Monja Human's PhD is done within Cricket South Africa and not within the HPC context.

MA-Student

There is one MA (Psychology) student who will be doing a qualitative study (IPA) with the sport scientists at the HPC. She is Rozanne Mare. She will develop and present her own MAC

programme to the HPC sport scientists, which will be followed by a reflection interview, an application period where the sport scientists will apply the MAC programme to the athletes they work with, followed by another reflection interview. The conducting of the reflection interviews, transcriptions and data analysis (IPA) will be done by Rozanne Mare individually. Lourens Human will be the supervisor for this project.

MA (Counselling Psychology/Sport Psychology)

There are currently three MA (Counselling Psychology/Sport Psychology) students, Lauren Leon, Ile Schutte and Ellie Dykema. All three will do mini-dissertations with athletes in three different sports, swimming, equestrian and athletics respectively. All three students will develop and implement sport specific MAC programmes with HPC adolescent athletes, where after they will conduct semi-structured interviews, transcribe the interviews and analyze the data (IPA) and report the findings. These are also qualitative studies of limited scope. Lourens Human will be the supervisor for these studies.

Kind regards



David Maree

Acting HOD: Department of Psychology